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Frontispiece.

KEPT FROM IDOLS.

Denison, Mary (Andrews) "Mrs.

C. W. Denison.

M. A. D.

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY IRA BRADLEY & CO.,

162 WASHINGTON STREET.

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KEPT FROM IDOLS.



CHAPTER I.

NEWS FROM A FAR COUNTRY.



LETTER for you, Miss Margaret," said Sarah, coming in out of the kitchen.

"From Calcutta!" exclaimed Margaret, her face brightening,— "from brother Charley."

She hurried to her own pleasant room upstairs, and read the letter with a smiling face. One sentence set her heart to beating more quickly than was its wont.

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"If you decide to come, dear sister, I have a friend in America who will see you on board the ship, and take good care of you. For the sake of my motherless little Ida, I hope you may be able to see your way clear. You know she is named after you, Margaret Ida, though we all call her Ida, — her mother's name."

Margaret read silently to the end, laid away her letter, drew her chair nearer to the window, and let her eyes rest upon the pleasant landscape before her as she thought. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were bright; for this letter had called into exercise all the best feelings of her nature.

She had long loved that strange, little name-child whom she had never seen, — "the curious little creature," her father called her, who had been so long dependent upon native servants. She had dreamed of her, and made pictures of her little face that were passing beautiful.

Her brother Charley was nearer Margaret's

age than either Robert or John, her elder brothers. John had been her idol till he professed himself an infidel ; and, though Margaret was not a Christian herself, the discovery of this dereliction from all that was good and holy gave her feelings a terrible revulsion. Then her heart had yearned toward Robert ; but he was immersed in business, besides getting ready to bring a wife to Mossy Bank ; so there could be no room in his heart for her, she thought.

Now she expended all her tenderness upon Charley, since he wrote for her to come out to his tropical home. His little child, he said, needed her care ; he needed her love and sympathy.

Here, then, was a new call upon Margaret's heart ; a change from the routine of Mossy Bank, her brother Robert's beautiful home ; a chance for some vital, unusual labor.

She had just refused a tempting opportunity of seeing the world.

Her brother John was going as a government official to Rome. Margaret was his favorite sister, and he had urged her to accompany him, and do the honors of his house. But his rejection of the faith in which she had been born and bred had so profoundly stirred the pulse of her being, that she replied, almost in anger, that she could have nothing whatever to do with one who stood outside all her sympathies, even if that one was her brother.

Then John exclaimed that she was a self-righteous little Pharisee, and went away in a rage, but sorely wounded. He had so built upon having his beautiful, best-loved sister with him. He knew, too, how strongly she desired to see that part of the world to which he was going.

"If she can be stubborn," he said to himself, "so can I." And yet he could not help hoping that she would think better of it.

Margaret looked across the fields sleeping

calmly under the summer sun. In her heart she was already and half-joyously taking her farewell of mountain, valley, and the familiar river.

In an opening made by a new road cut through a belt of forest, the antique red gable of a farmhouse was discernible.

The old Ransom farm was Margaret's birth-place. From there she had seen father and mother carried to the grave within the space of six months, — one surviving the other only that short period.

That was before Charley went to India, nearly ten years ago.

She had always loved the old homestead, embosomed in the green foliage, better than Robert's smart new house. Every nook and corner held some pleasant memory, and, as her eye rested fondly on its sunny roof, she made up her mind.

"I'll go to Charley, for he needs me most," she murmured. "It will be something of a

sacrifice ; but that is what I have been longing for. Who knows what great things I may do ? Here my field is unpromising, my opportunities are few. There, I shall see the wonders of a new world ; I shall have Charley's child to instruct, and she will love me. I can mould her as I will, dear little creature ! I love her, never having seen her. John has failed me ; Robert no longer feels that I am essential to his comfort ; Eleanor is married, and bound up in her new ties ; I am left alone, and I will go to Charley."

She let down the curtains and took up her work, saying to herself that now she should have something to occupy her mind, cast a glance at the mirror, in passing, to see that her hair and collar were in order, and went downstairs with a light heart.

Sarah, the only domestic at Mossy Bank, sat just inside the kitchen and near the dining-room door. She was a tall, resolute-looking woman,

with sharp black eyes, and a mouth that when shut appeared as incapable of opening as if it were carved in marble. Women with those resolute jaws always have a purpose in life to which everything else must bend, and Sarah had one. It was the shaping of the future of her sister's child, a sturdy boy of nine years. Her sister was poor and sickly, but managed to make a living for herself and the boy by doing up fine linen. Sarah had taken his education upon herself.

"Them's the last of the peas, Miss Margaret," she said, as her young mistress took her seat at the sewing-machine close by.

"All gone, are they?" Margaret made reply, absently; then there was a brief silence.

"'Spose you heard the Mays was coming," Sarah said again, with a grim contortion.

"So I heard."

"And Robert means to marry Miss Lettie.

How in the world your brother Robert can fancy such a godless creature as Lettie May passes my comprehension. Her mission aint to build up,—it's to destroy. There's been so many ministers in your family, too,—a pious family, all through, till it comes to your brother John. If *he* had only taken to Miss Lettie, it wouldn't a' been no wonder to me, for he's clean gone astray."

There was another long silence, during which the sewing-machine did all the talking. Suddenly Sarah spoke again, with almost the energy of anger in her voice.

"Well, good-by, Mossy Bank, when she comes to be mistress! — that's all I've got to say. I *can* repeat my prayers, now, with a clear conscience; but if I was to be under that giddy, godless creature, I'd be breaking some commandment, I'm afeared, every hour in the day."

"O Sarah!" cried Margaret, stopping her

work, "you'd never forsake poor Robert, whatever happened."

"Wouldn't I? What does poor Robert want of me? Do you think I'd stay here with that woman, whose soul's no more 'count to her than so many chips? I'd be afraid the house'd burn down over our heads."

Margaret felt her heart sink within her; and yet she could not seriously blame Sarah, for she said to herself that under no consideration could she live under the same roof with Lettie May. It would be impossible, where each would naturally repulse the other. She was not sure but, in a mild way, she should hate her brother's wife.

Sarah left her seat, and presently Margaret was startled by a shrill cry. It was Sarah's exclamation of terror, and Margaret let her work fall.

"Miss Maggie, what has happened? — what *has* happened?"

Margaret flew to the window, pale with apprehension. A confused sound of men's voices, a shuffling of feet under the window, greeted her ears. She grew dizzy and sick.





CHAPTER II.

THE ROCK OF AGES.



H, what has happened to Robert?" she cried, going out, trembling.

"'Tisn't him, miss," said one of the men; "it's Mr. Winthrop."

"Our minister!"

"Yes, miss; we daren't take him any further."

"Bring him into my brother's room; fortunately there is a bed there; this way;" and she led them into an apartment intended at some future time to be the library.

"Is he killed?" she asked, breathlessly.

"We hopes not, miss. I guess he's only fainted, but don' know. He was down to the

Quarries, you see ; been calling upon some poor folks there, and a good friend he is to 'em too. Somehow he got in the way of the blast, and was knocked down. Such things kills men, sometimes ; but we hopes he's on'y stunned. There ! now he's fixed comfortable ; we've sent for the doctor, and I guess that's him who's coming."

Margaret stole timidly round to the pillow, and bent low over the white face. He did not seem to breathe.

"He is dead !" she cried, catching her breath.
"Oh, how dreadful !"

"Well — I'm sorry to see this."

The doctor came bustling in, — a small rotund personage, with twinkling eyes, a large bald spot on his crown. Dr. Ogilvie was the boldest free-thinker in town.

"It's Winthrop, eh?" And, as the men went out, he proceeded to examine his patient professionally.

"He got this doing his duty, he would say, I suppose," the doctor laughed, sardonically. "I'll be bound he was trying to convert those rascallions at the Quarry, — people past hope for anything. I don't believe it's a man's duty to go prowling about such dangerous places. Rather queer, isn't it, Miss Margaret," added the doctor, "that the Lord gives his best servants such raps on the head? It has been a study a long time with me," he went on, leisurely taking off the minister's coat-sleeve, "these dispensations that pious people call providences.

"Won't you please hand me a bowl? Apt to faint, Miss Margaret? I don't often let blood, but in this case it must be done. Can you help me?"

"I think I can," said Margaret.

"So do I; all right, then; you've a steady hand, good! I can always trust people of your complexion. There's concealed strength under that delicate color. As I was saying, I've been

studying those things that our church-loving people call providences, and it strikes me that, in most cases, it's very much like helping your friend, and getting a slap in the face for it. If they are hidden blessings, all I can say is, they're hidden too deep for me. That will do, the man is coming to his senses."

The pale and hitherto nerveless features contracted as with a spasm, then the white lips moved, and presently repeated: —

"But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God; yea, let them *exceedingly* rejoice.

"Lord, thou art our helper — thou art our refuge."

"Quotes Scripture in his dreams, I expect." said the doctor, watching his patient from under his shaggy eyebrows, and with protruded underlip.

The face of the unconscious man quivered again. A sudden tender solicitude filled every

channel, deepening the sweetness of his expression, as he tremulously lifted his hands.

"Oh, if I could but make you *feel* the divine presence of Christ!"

And again, — evidently in the bewilderment of his struggling consciousness in the presence of his congregation: —

"My soul longs for souls! nay, faints in its longing to teach you the better way, — the way of Christ, — the way of the cross. Does this poor earth, with its vanishing pleasures, its humiliations, its petty deceits, satisfy your hungry hearts?" The doctor frowned and cleared his throat energetically. As for Margaret, she forgot to wipe her tears away, so engrossed was she in this new experience. They ran down her cheeks and dropped like silent pearls on the floor.

"Treating us to a sermon," growled the doctor. "It's a good sign; he'll be all right in a few moments; no bones broken fortunately; a

general shaking up, that's all. Be careful to see that the bandages are not displaced for an hour or two. I'll call round again. Good-morning, Miss Margaret; you'd make a capital nurse. Good-morning."

Margaret went out to speak to Sarah, who did not show the interest she felt, but, stoic-like, had kept about her cooking.

"If they want me they'll call me," she had said to herself. "Got hurt in the Quarries, I 'spose; he's over there once a week, I've heard. Well, all I can say is, that if the Lord is going to take anybody out of *that* place, it had better be the minister, for he was the only one fit to go, I guess."

"Perhaps you had better make a little tea, Sarah," said Margaret.

"It's the first thing I always do, in case of accident, Miss Margaret," replied Sarah; and Margaret returned to her post.

Standing there, watching him, she thought

how near he had been to death, and wondered what his sister would have done had she known it. She had given the doctor strict directions not to spread the news, and the men were back to their work.

"He has a grand head," she said to herself; "a good face."

As if with a bound of all the faculties, the minister's eyes came open. Their glances wandered wonderingly about the room, and did not at first fall upon Margaret, who, with an instinctive feeling of delicacy, had moved back.

"Strange!" he said, softly; "my brain feels crowded. Where am I? Where is Birdie? An unusual languor oppresses me."

"You have been hurt," said a low, soft voice, and Margaret came within his line of vision. "You were brought in here; it was nearer than your own home."

"Oh, this is Miss Ransom! I see; I am in Mr. Robert Ransom's house. Yes, I remember; I

was thinking of calling here within a day or two ; strange ! ”

He had been proposing to himself, for some time, to call, wondering how he might address these his parishioners with the solemn question that weighed upon his soul, — a question it was his privilege, as well as duty, to put to any listener, whether of high or of low degree — even to haughty Miss Margaret Ransom, as she was called by some. He knew that she was seeking for peace everywhere but in that place where only peace is to be found.

“ I have been hurt in some manner,” he murmured, a few moments after. “ I remember the earth seemed to give way beneath me. It was a shock, sudden and terrible. Oh, the Quarry ! I remember now ; I went there to talk with Williams. Was I struck ? Does the doctor think I am seriously injured ? ”

“ Oh, no,” Margaret replied, quickly, her con-

science troubled at every searching glance of his eyes; "you were only stunned."

"Thank God! though if it had been death," he murmured, partly to himself, "I think I should have been ready to go." Then after a short pause, "Are *you* ready? Is your hope founded upon the Rock of Ages?"

His voice was tremulous with feeling; his weakness gave him power. At any other time Margaret would have been ready for him, — would have told him that she was trying to live as near right as she could, and that was all, *she thought*, that was needed. She might have resented the question, even from the minister, as an impertinence.

Now, this wan image, this face that she had seen in a hush so like that everlasting repose, in the deathliness that was stamped upon it; now, that voice, tender with all the thronging possibilities that rushed upon the man so strangely rescued from death, shook her as she had never

been moved before. She held back her tears, and controlled her voice ; but she had the grace to reply : —

“ I don’t know anything about it ; I am *not* ready.”

“ What, then, shall I say to you ? How make known a Saviour’s love ? ” was the next gentle utterance.

“ Not now,” she half sobbed. “ I can’t talk now. I am bewildered, and you need rest. Some time, perhaps, I will send for you, — will see you ; that is, when I feel like talking about it.”

“ You have sealed my lips,” he said, regretfully, and turned his face away, sorrowful.

So Margaret put from her life the sweetest draught that Heaven ever vouchsafed to mortal taste. She closed her hands wilfully against a fortune that would have made her a princess, yea, a queen ; she shut more closely the door, leading from her heart, that would have let her into heaven.



CHAPTER III.

THE TROUBLED HEART.

DON'T he want something to eat, Miss Margaret?" asked Sarah, meeting her mistress as she came out of the room.

"Hush, Sarah, I think he is sleeping now," said Margaret, coming forward. She had been crying a little. What this man had said touched her heart to its inmost depths.

"Your eyes are as red as beets," continued Sarah; "he aint a-going to die, I hope."

"No — I hope not. I am very nervous, Sarah; he looked so like death; and — but I shall get over it soon; don't mind me."

She was still trying to strangle the drops that kept welling up.

Sarah smiled one of her gloomiest smiles.

"Better eat your dinner," she said; "the peas is beautiful — and I found a dishful of strawberries. I picked 'em for you."

"Thank you, Sarah; how kind of you!"

"Not particularly," muttered Sarah, who watched like a cat for any morsel of praise, and snapped at it, though secretly it pleased her. "Here's some tea, though in general I don't approve of it three times a day. I thought *he* might like some more. Good folks are put in the screws, sometimes. Was he frightened?"

"Oh, no; he seemed prepared for the worst."

"Ought to be. Folks say ministers can't be any better than other men. I say they should be, with all the opportunities they have; they ought to live right close up to the Master."

The doctor came in again, and advised quiet. "Getting along nicely," he said; "queer

chap, but sincere ; more sincere than polite, I guess. He's got a mental shock, as well as a bodily one. I don't know but I shall put myself out to hear a sermon or two after this. We'll turn the wrench though ; we poor sinners must look out, Miss Margaret."

Margaret smiled, but away down in her heart, that had never been so stirred before, echoed the words : —

"Is your hope founded upon the Rock of Ages?"

Persistently she asked herself, for she had been religiously educated, "Was this all done for me? Did this thing happen by permission, that I might be affected by it? Is it a special providence to call me into a better way?"

She could not read or sew, and folded her hands in a strange, hopeless mood.

She drew near the window after a while, and leaned out, enjoying the fragrance of the sweet Provence roses that thrust their pretty faces in

with glittering drops upon them, for the rain had fallen a few moments before. The room was alight with a clear, dark glow that made the glass and silver on the table, and the rich brown furniture, gleam as if under the touch of magic. The sun was going under one of the heavy banks of cloud that looked like lurid fire in the distance.

"After all, one need not feel gloomy, with so much of the beauty of nature around one," she murmured, leaving the room for the shaded garden outside; and she walked up and down between quaint rows of box, asking herself strange questions, like a child waking up to some new, startling reality, which *must* be met. Suddenly a step sounded.

"Robert!" she cried, joyfully, "I'm so glad you've come!"

"Well, I *should* think so," said her brother, holding her at arm's length; "you look solemnly delighted."

"Oh, but I can't help being a little nervous," she responded, in a low voice. "Such things have happened! Mr Winthrop got stunned, and they brought him here; he is here now."

"Greek!" laughed Robert, till his sunny face was all alight. "Got stunned? — it's his place to stun others, I should say."

"Well, but he was down by the Quarry, and —"

"Oh, translation! I understand you now. You don't mean that he was blown up?"

"Yes, I do; but fortunately he was not much hurt. Doctor Green thinks he can go home to-night."

"So there's a body of Divinity lodged in my house, eh?"

"He is a good man, Robert."

"Who said he wasn't, dear? How serious you look! Do you think of joining the church on the strength of this accident?"

"Don't jest, Robert," said Margaret, quietly;

"perhaps it would be the best thing we could both do."

"Where is he?"

"In the library."

"Then I'll go upstairs;" and, laughing, he disappeared.

When the tea-bell rang, Robert came down, with a half-scared look. Seeing nobody but Margaret and Sarah, he sat down relieved.

"You know I can't endure being preached to," he said, taking his cup from his sister's hands. "I wonder if *he* is one of those inquisitors who force your notions from you, without due regard to time and place?"

"It's little good preaching would do you, Mr. Robert, I'm afraid," said grim Sarah, setting her resolute lips together. "There's them that gits past hope."

"Ah, Sarah may preach," said Robert, with a twinkle in his eye. Sarah marched out of the room.

"You have offended her," Margaret said, looking after her.

"Pshaw! I could twist Sarah round my finger," was his reply; and, strangely enough, they were both thinking of the same thing, — how Sarah would put up with a new mistress.

"Sarah mustn't try to rule me, you know." It was Robert who spoke.

"She never thought of such a thing, Robert; but she is so used to us! I never think of getting angry at anything she says. She thinks the world of you."

"Are the Mays coming here?" asked Margaret, after a long silence.

Robert changed color a little, and said he believed so. "They are getting the house ready, at all events," he added. "It looks very well; I came round that way. The orchard is growing finely. Oh! by-the-by, here are some letters, — one for you."

Margaret pushed aside her cup and saucer,

and was deep in the contents of her sister Eleanor's letter, when a voice startled them by saying : —

"I heard the dishes rattle. May I have some tea with you?"

It was Mr. Winthrop. He stood there, still pale, supporting himself by the frame of the door. "I am quite well," he added, smiling at their look of consternation, "only a little weak."

"Let me help you," said Robert, and lent him his strong arm, leading him to the table. "I hear you have had a narrow escape;" and he was all cordiality, for his tender heart was shocked at sight of his pale face.

"Yes; by the mercy of God, I am here," was the quiet reply. "The sun is setting clear, I perceive."

"Yes," was Robert's response; "we shall have good weather for corn now."

The minister sipped from his cup in silence. He was thinking how his little lame sister would

have been shocked, if they had carried him home. The tea proved an innocent stimulant; he had never talked so brilliantly as now, — science, politics, agriculture, nothing came amiss.

“I tell you what, dear,” said Robert, heartily, after he came back from taking the minister home in his carryall, “there’s more in that fellow than I gave him credit for. I believe I shall like him yet. There’s no nonsense about him.”

Margaret smiled, and sighed. The vivid impression of that first meeting, the solemn question that she could not answer, had not worn off yet. She felt weary and unhappy; and that was very far from being her usual habit.

Robert went off when the lamps were lighted, and Margaret sat in the moonlight, alone, thinking of many things. Sarah’s sharp voice, and little Tommy’s softer notes, reciting his lesson to his aunt, floated in from the room beyond.

For Sarah often declared that Tom's poor mother had no head, — not a particle, — and that she, Sarah, was set here for that particular duty, like the woman who took her son to the temple and gave him to the Lord.

Presently Sarah came in.

"What are you settin' here alone for?" she asked.

"Thinking," said Margaret, with a sad smile.

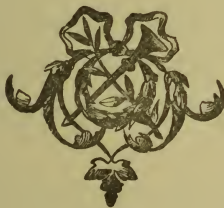
"The Bible teaches us to commune with our own hearts. Miss Margaret, I feel it in my bones that you're going to get religion."

"How am I to get it, as you say, Sarah? That always sounds absurd to me."

"Why, how do you get anything, child, if you don't make some effort? You've got to get a peach off the tree, if you want it, and, even if it drops, you must stretch out your hand and take it; tisn't likely to drop into your mouth."

"I do the best I can, Sarah."

"You think you do, Miss Margaret, but there's a wide difference between thinking and doing. I aint a-going to preach, but I want to see you what your mother was before you. Why, she was in the church, and active at your age, dear heart! 'Twas bad for all o' you children, — at least, I aint a-going to say anything 'gainst God's providence; but it does seem's though if she'd a' been spared till now, Mr. John wouldn't a' gone wrong, and Mr. Robert would have married a good, sensible girl. Well, well, things won't fashion themselves to our liking."





CHAPTER IV.

REVIEWING THE PAST.



ROBERT RANSOM came of a race distinguished peculiarly for two things, — steadiness of purpose, and decided views in religious matters.

His father, grandfather, and great grandfather had been clergymen. They had all made their mark upon the generations of their day, had married good women, and left their names in imperishable records, as godly men, full of the Holy Ghost.

As Sarah said, the men of that family had degenerated. Robert was noble, in his way, highly moral, and full of good intentions, but

experimentally he did not know the meaning of the word religion; Charles was immersed in business, across the sea, leaving his little, susceptible child to the care of heathen servants; and John had broken loose from the moorings of the old belief, and pronounced himself a liberal, — meaning that he was utterly without God and without Christ in the world.

Margaret was loving, self-poised, prone to make props for herself, and blame heaven when they fell. She tried hard to walk in the old landmarks, but was far too proud to go in the old, accepted way. She was enthusiastic, considered herself, most of the time, a commendable Christian; laid down rules, punished herself rigorously for any deviation therefrom, and was a little too ready to repeat the prayer of the self-righteous man: —

“Lord, I thank thee that thou hast not made me like others.”

One by one her strongholds had given way.

Very tenacious in her affections, she was prone to worship earthly gods ; and it was a favorite saying of hers, that whatever she loved she lost.

Margaret, like many another in these strange times, felt herself sufficient for all things. Nobody denounced sin more persistently than she did. It was almost heroic in her to give up Rome because her brother had ignored the religion of his fathers.

It was a great disappointment to her that the woman Robert would soon bring to Mossy Bank was frivolous, empty-headed, and vain beyond all comparison. Her quiet, home-loving brother, gentle almost as a woman, to whose wants she had ministered for so many years, — for Margaret was twenty-six, and had already fought some of life's battles, — she pitied him, because she saw, as she fancied, the coming desolation. Her brother's wife would crave admiration and excitement. She would turn his house into a Ba-

bel with company. Where could there possibly be a providence in that? she wondered.

On the night succeeding the accident, Margaret sat in her own room till the clock struck twelve, thinking sadly of the past. Once or twice, leaning her head on her hands, she cried, softly. The beauty of the silver moonlight lacked its usual power to soothe her; even the delightful thought of the voyage to Charley had lost its zest.

The look, the words, of the good minister haunted her. She was in an excited, irritable mood; things that John had said, —daring speculations, blasphemy, none the less blasphemy that it was cloaked by delicate phrases, and made beautiful by sophistry,—occurred to her mind with painful vividness. She wished all manner of foolish things, and for a time considered herself the most miserable creature in existence.

With all, she was strangely enough inclined

to be angry with the minister, for having stirred this rebellion in her soul.

"The pulpit is his place," she said. "He has no right to invade the houses of his parishioners. If one has to confess, one might as well be a Romanist, and take one's own time for doing it. Men have no right to take advantage of peculiar states of mind. One don't want to be forced into believing. Of course," she mused on, "there is something in it. All our family have been religious, and it must be in the blood. Perhaps I shall take it, by and by, but I don't want to yet. If it's a gain to have a good ancestry, why, there's that much in my favor. Besides, I don't know why I should have any particular uneasiness. I've tried to live right all my life, prayed, and read my Bible ever since I could pray and read. I know the Psalms by heart. I try to do good to my neighbor. I" — here she faltered — "I am sure I believe in Jesus Christ," — feeling con-

scious, at the moment, of a strange antipathy towards the Son of God; "that is, I believe he died for us; that he was the image of the Father; — and what else is necessary?

"As John says, a good deal of this religious talk is cant and jargon; perhaps I shouldn't say that," — with an involuntary shudder, — "because Christ is in it; that is, his name is used, his example held up.

"I've read 'Edwards on the Will,'" she continued, "and all grandfather's sermons, and I should like to know what I do that is so very sinful? I visit the poor; I curb my temper; I try to do all the good I can; why, then, should that man's words haunt me so?

"'Founded upon the Rock of Ages,' — that's religious phraseology. There's nothing more desolate and barren-looking than a rock. It's hard, and cold, and perfectly immovable. I don't like the figure; I had rather have a warm, living heart, with human sympathies."

Then came a great sigh, and a long, troubled silence.

This holding communion with one's self in quiet and solitude is something awful, when one reflects that somewhere, close by, is a great and mighty witness, — some angel of the Lord, watching with a strange solicitude upon its face, bright with the reflected glory of the eternal world; watching with a tender earnestness, ready to snatch and embalm forever the first beam of hope; watching with a hallowed love, that with unseen force struggles to guide the darkened soul, longing to see it come with childlike confidence into the Father's rest and peace, that many a sore trial, many a terrible temptation, may be spared.

These witnesses, O impure hearts, O lives of deception, O soul masked before the multitude; these attendants, who never speak with mortal voices, the touch of whose fingers is never visibly felt, the tenor of whose glance is

never seen, though it penetrates sometimes to the shrinking core of your being,—see and record with an unerring pen the sum of your life's vices, and meannesses, and wanton sins, from moment to moment; and if you will not accept them as your guides, your ministering angels, drawing you on to a better, purer, nobler life, they stand eternally as your accusers in the presence of God and man.

At last, Margaret slowly arose, read a chapter in her Bible, with a heart full of unrest, and, eyes swimming in tears, knelt in wordless prayer,—for she could think of nothing to say in her present mood,—and went to bed more miserable than she had been for many a day.





CHAPTER V.

AN INTERVIEW.

STRANGELY enough, on the following morning, Margaret was singing as blithely as her canary that hung outside the window.

The pure, early light and the sweet sunshine dispelled much of the gloom of yesterday. Besides, she had made up her mind, before rising, to be *extra* good hereafter; to compose a petition every night, in which all her possible wants might be embodied; to read two chapters in the Bible daily, and some extracts from "Divine Food," wherewith to shape her course for the day. She was quite at ease with herself,

now, and anticipated no more trials. Certainly she did not look for what met her vision the moment she opened the sitting-room door, — a dark and bearded man, whose countenance was grave almost to sorrow; whose face and eyes betrayed great power of expression and repression.

"Why, John!" she cried, as the dark face lighted brilliantly at the sound of her voice.

"You're as fresh as a rose-bud, my darling," he said, imprinting a kiss on her cheek. "I couldn't go away without running up to say good-by, you see."

"Of course you couldn't, John," she replied; but her smile was not as ready as his. She was wondering whether the visit ought to make her glad or sorry.

"How soon do you go?" she asked.

"To-morrow, if" — he closed his lips tightly, then parted them to add, — "if I *must* go alone."

Margaret feared that the battle had all to be

fought over again. Robert came in, in his usual noisy manner.

"I was afraid you would get off without our seeing you again," he said. "This is very kind; come, take some of Margaret's coffee."

They drew up to the table.

"The Mays are coming back, I hear," said John, who did not know of his brother's engagement. "Take care of Lettie, Robert; she's pretty, but the nearest to a nobody that I think I have ever met, — empty-headed, you know."

"Hush, John!" said Margaret, as Robert flushed.

"Oh, all right," John responded, hastily, after a prolonged stare.

"Maggie, come and walk over to the old burying-ground," John said, when breakfast was over, "I want to see mother's grave." Margaret was on the point of exclaiming, "How can you?" but she checked herself. He knew, too, what a devoted, saint-like woman she had

been, and how earnestly, and with tears, she had often prayed for her children. It would have broken her heart, — John's defection, — if she had lived.

Margaret threw on her hat. The tears were welling to her eyes, and they passed out together.

John looked about him.

"Robert's taste in flowers is exquisite," he said. "What clusters of azalias! I mean to have a garden in Rome, — in Rome, little one; only think of it!"

The word made her ears tingle; but another duty called her now, — the care of Charley's child, — and she was glad she had something tangible for an excuse.

"Yes, it would be delightful," said Margaret; then looking up as his eyes met hers, she added, 'if one could go with a clear conscience.'

"As I do," he responded, quickly.

They walked on in silence. The sun fell in

heavenly calm over the small graveyard, as they neared it. Margaret had her hands full of flowers. She put them in the small iron vase that stood at the head of her mother's grave.

"What a peaceful spot!" said John. "Here, at last, we can rest."

"Not here," Margaret responded, her voice broken.

"We won't talk theology now, dear," said John, passing his arm about his sister's waist, and seating her beside him on an adjacent tombstone. "Maggy, the more I think about it, the more I want you. You *must* go with me. By and by Robert will be married, and then think how lonesome you will be. I don't care about anybody but you. I must have my little sister."

"I can't go, John," she faltered.

"Is it altogether because of my unbelief?" he asked, in a sterner voice.

"Not altogether," was the reply.

"Well, I suppose I must give you up. I've tried to be a philosopher, a stoic, tried to harden my heart against you, taken your picture out of my album — but — I'm only human after all. The heart will be where the treasure is," he added, bitterly.

This man, dark with the mists of unbelief, nevertheless quoted Scripture.

"Suppose I professed myself a believer?" he asked, in a changed voice, "would it make a difference?"

"Then you would only be a hypocrite, John," she said, quietly.

"How well you women fathom our hearts!" he replied. "Yes, I should be a hypocrite. What I am, I must be wholly and boldly. You talk of God; I talk of beneficent nature. I will not believe that from nothing the world could be called into existence. But, stop; I am getting into my theories, and they trouble you. I could not be devout in seeming, drop my face

into my hat under pretence of a whispered prayer, bend my knees and bow my head, because I despise these things, and make no secret of it. But, if you go with me, how do you know but your influence may weigh more with me than all the doctrines of the prophets of our day? One grows into the habit of religion, you know. Did you ever think of that?"

"Yes, John; but yours is the stronger mind, I think; the more powerful will, and you would only drag me down into the mire of unbelief. I should have no chance with you, and I dare not peril my soul. If it was Robert who had changed his belief, — if he needed me, I would not hesitate, because I think I could guide him. Besides —"

"What nonsense!" he interrupted, impatiently. "Couldn't we simply let each other's views alone?"

"No, John; my conscience would not allow me to let you alone, and so drift to destruction.

Remember, *I* believe in God, as she did," — pointing to the grave, — "as they both did, — our parents."

"You believe ; yes, with your senses. What has your will, your individual conscience, to do with it? You believe because it was innoculated in your infant mind ; fed to you like so much pap, from childhood up to the time when the mental tablets were covered with wise saws and theological rubbish. You believe ! you don't know what you do believe, I'll wager ; you, who never confessed before the jury of the church, enlighten me ! What do you know about God?"

"I know that he *is*," she answered, solemnly. "How can you, brought up by Christian parents, hold the belief which you do? I have not the experience that I wish I had, but *some* time — it may be years hence, it may be from my dying bed, or beside yours — some time I *will* answer you, John, dear, misguided brother."

For a moment he was silenced. The sweet purity of her voice seemed to sink into his soul. The mysterious tenant, over which he had no control, looked with rebuke from her gentle woman's eyes. As for her, what she had spoken was as sacred as a vow, and he knew it.

"You may, you may," he said, hurriedly. "It is just possible. I forgot that you sit now under the eloquence of Mr. Winthrop."

"I have very seldom heard Mr. Winthrop," said Margaret, quietly. "But I was going to tell you that Charley has invited me to go on to India, to care for his little child."

"And you are going?"

"Yes."

His cheek paled.

"So he has but to beckon with his finger, and you follow," he said, angrily.

"The duty is more imperative. His child has no mother."

"And has had none for five years," he said, dryly.

"The child is in danger, surrounded by pagans."

"Oh, I see; you wish to make a disciple of her. Forgive me, Margaret, but I am bitterly disappointed. You should have had no cares, no duties, with me. I had promised myself so much pleasure, showing you all the wonders of that wonderful city, having you all to myself. But no matter. I won't tell you that you might have had the moulding of a human soul in your hands, because my mind is fixed, my feet are planted."

"But not on the Rock of Ages," said Margaret, impulsively, restraining her tears.

"I don't understand that sort of jargon," he said, recklessly. "Let us walk home. I came out here, hopeful; I go away, sorrowful. Margaret, I wish you could decide otherwise. Try and see if you cannot. Think of the perils of

that long journey; the gales, the poisonous insects, the fevers, the malaria, the burning heats. That child will never love you as I do. How can you give me up for her? Come, Margaret, go to Rome with me. I will never speak to you about your faith. You shall be free to choose your own place of worship. I will not be bigoted and unreasonable, dear Margaret."

But Margaret still shook her head.





CHAPTER VI.

LETTIE MAY.

ETERNALLY good-by." That was what John had said in his passion, as they parted. How the words rung in her ears! Was she sorry? Was she glad that the trial had not moved her? She could not tell. It seemed to her, she thought, as if all life's troubles were beginning; that she had never felt so weak and wretched as now. Oh for something to lean on that would not break under her!

"The Rock! the Rock!"

A new significance burst upon her. The Rock! Emblem of strength; power to with-

hold ; shadow in the hot sun ; coolness in the desert ; resistless to the beatings of wind and wave ; shelter for all sad souls.

"How shall I find it, and where?" she moaned, stumbling on over the uneven ground. "Oh ! if mother had lived she would have led me to the Rock ; now I must find it alone, and cling to it with bruised and bleeding fingers."

She heard the joyous laugh of Sarah's little nephew. He was skimming stones over the surface of the quiet stream, oblivious of the passage of time, or the forthcoming perils by rod and fool's cap.

"Happy boy ! I wish I was a child again," cried miserable Margaret. "But, then, I suppose, I should have it all to go over again in some form.

"Poor John !" she moaned, her tears falling now ; "how strangely he balances between good and evil ! What power prompted me to say that some time I would answer him ? I may

never be a Christian. In all probability I never shall in the way they tell me I must be. I was happy this morning — so happy. But though the day is so beautiful, I feel sad, very sad.”

Talking to herself thus, by fits and starts, she walked deliberately up to a horse’s head, and started back with a cry of fear.

“Dear me; why, it’s Maggy Ransom!” cried a thin, high-pitched voice, as the reins were hurriedly pulled. “Lucky Beauty was only walking or I might have run you down.”

“Miss May!” exclaimed Margaret, more in consternation than surprise.

“Please don’t ‘Miss’ me; I can’t bear to have anybody do that. Call me Lettie. I came out alone with the groom. So impatient to see the old place! How well you are looking! Country air is such a preservative. Papa was sick, or he would have driven out with me. He is very anxious to get back to Salem. Didn’t I see your brother John, just

now? He didn't deign to notice me no more than if I had been a bear. Get in, won't you, and let me drive you home."

Margaret was in no mood to assert herself, though she would rather have walked. To think of her trial, of John's almost angry parting with her, and to see Lettie sitting there, cool, and beautiful, and unruffled, in her laces, her delicate gloves, her bloom, that looked so faint and natural, — but was not, — her fashionable attire, as perfect in her way and as soulless as some winsome flower, fresh from conquests, from humiliations, from possible rents of character, after her winter in the city, was her Nemesis for the moment.

"*She* has no qualms of conscience," she thought, half enviously; "no doubts to solve, no cares, and no disappointments that seriously affect her happiness."

"You're paler than you were, Margaret," continued Lettie, piqued at the former's inattention.

"I used to envy you your complexion. Isn't it lovely to-day?"

Margaret's brief bitterness had blotted out all the beauty of the day just now. She awoke suddenly to the great glory of sky and field; of distant forest and near river; of wayside blossoms not yet defiled by the dust of travel.

"Are you still at Mossy Bank? And is Sarah there?" queried Lettie.

"Yes."

"Strange creature, that Sarah! I believe I used to hate her. How can you keep good-natured with her, I wonder? I couldn't."

"We never quarrel," said Margaret, with a cold smile;—and then to herself, "Cool declaration of hostilities! Sarah shall go with me."

"Won't you get in?" and the reins were tightened. "You might, just as well; I'm going directly by your house." Margaret changed her mind and let Miss May drive her home.

"I had to pull my hair to make sure I was in my right senses," cried Sarah, as Margaret went in and Lettie drove away. "You riding about with *that* woman!"

"We might as well be friends with my brother's future wife," said Margaret, coldly.

"Friends! not me, Miss Margaret. She's got no more soul than a cat, that girl! I know her of old. All she lives for is to flirt, and dress, and go to parties. She can't talk of anything else; it isn't in her. She's a thoroughly godless woman, I tell you. And, according to my notions, the house she gets in'll never prosper. I tell you, I foresee trouble, Miss Margaret. What Scotch blood there is in me goes creeping up my backbone, every time I think of her coming here. Poor Mr. Robert! it's bad enough to have no religious faith himself! And a wife like that to rule him — for rule she will — will make his home a Bedlam. I can't stay where there's no religion."

"Why, Sarah," said Margaret, smiling, "I'm sure neither Robert nor I come up to your standard."

"No; but you're the children of prayer. I never give up them as has been prayed for, and put into God's hand, by dying lips—never. Robert and you'll both come into the kingdom, and that before long. Mark my words. It may be that trouble'll do it."

"O Sarah, don't prophesy trouble," exclaimed Margaret. "I've had enough of it."

"Well, I won't; only I will say, the Lord never 'lows us to have any idols," said Sarah, significantly, and passed out into the kitchen.

Margaret tried resolutely to forget her interview with her brother. She bent all her energies to the duties she had in hand. When her dismal forebodings threatened to overrule her better judgment she looked happily forward to her intended journey. What visions she saw! what dreams she dreamed! At night Charley's

child nestled close to her heart, its golden curls against her cheek. She never thought of her but with a thrill of pleasure.

“Wait till I see Charley, and I shall forget all my troubles and be perfectly happy,” she said, again and again.

Sarah cooked and muttered, and stole a glance in at the door, once in a while, glad to see Margaret’s face sunny and smiling again. Robert wondered at his sister’s persistent industry; but he had found other channels of interest beside her society.

The time drew near in which Margaret should have had another missive from India. John was at his post, and had written her a strange, sarcastic letter, that caused her to be miserable for the day. Its descriptions of Italian life made her head dizzy. She felt that she should have been so truly at home in those brilliant circles of which he wrote. It could not be, she thought, that she was born always to blush

anseen ; to live a lonely, hermit life. Charley was rich and successful ; lived in splendor gave reunions at which all the celebrities were present. As the mistress of his home she could enjoy all her æsthetic inclinations to the top of her bent. Her taste was exquisite. She satisfied the eye with her power of expression in the fine art of dress, — not by wearing costly clothing, but by the beautiful adaptation of means to ends. A flower was oftener her ornament than jewels, a muslin dress than a silk one. She was graceful, — more charming than she knew, — and it is no wonder that John felt his home had lost its crowning excellence. As for him, he was angry with himself for not having prevailed upon her. She had always expressed her religious, or, rather, non-religious feelings before him freely, and he had thought to astonish, overpower, and conquer her by his brilliancy and daring, because she had no settled faith. It was an enigma to him that an unbelieving

woman should refuse him her companionship, on the score of his own more openly expressed unbelief.

Robert spoke of Miss Lettie May one day.

"Why don't you call on her?" he asked Margaret.

"If it will please you I will, Robert."

"I am sorry you don't like her," he added.

"I never said I didn't like her, Robert."

"No; but of course I can tell. She was never a favorite of yours. I suppose you consider her frivolous."

"I have thought so."

"You are mistaken, dear. Lettie has wonderful good sense. She has been noticed a great deal, you know, for her beauty; but it hasn't spoiled her. You would say so if you knew her better."

"For your sake, Robert," Margaret responded, in a low voice, that trembled a little in spite of

her effort at self-command, "I am trying to like her."

"Dear, unselfish Margaret! God bless you for that."

"Have you felt so deeply?" she asked, seeing his lip quiver, and the tears in his eyes.

"I was — afraid that you never could get along together, and I would rather never marry than drive my sister from the house."

"We couldn't get along together, dear Robert," she said, after a moment's pause. "I think there never should be a third party in the house of a newly married couple."

"But, Maggie, darling, where would you go? This is your home; you are my especial legacy."

"I am going to India," said Margaret, calmly,
"To India?"

"Yes; to take care of Charley's child."

"Margaret, are you crazy?"

"Why should you think me so? Charley has often wanted me, you know. Besides, my little

name-niece needs a different guardianship. Her servants and her nurse are idol-worshippers."

"But the dreadful voyage, Margaret! I shall wish you had gone with John."

"I shall be happier with Charley. Besides, you should not care so very much; you can spare me now, you know," and tears of natural regret filled her beautiful eyes.

"You are mistaken, darling; I can't spare you. I don't want you to go. I don't see how I can get along without you. Lettie is such a child; she always will be, I think."

"She is a year older than I am," said Margaret, smiling in the midst of her tears.

"Yes, she is; but she has none of your prudence and cleverness. She can't help it, you know; she has been petted and spoiled, but there are good qualities in her nature which a little discipline will bring out. Maggie, don't leave us. The sea is full of wrecks."

"I think I have made up my mind to go to Charley, Robert," she said, quietly.

He sighed and turned away.

"That's what all the work means, I suppose. Well, dear, you will be happy wherever you go, I am sure of that."

"As far as doing my duty will give me happiness. I am not naturally happy, Robert."

"You have been a sunbeam in my home, though," said Robert. "I don't blame you for choosing a more brilliant position; you are fitted for it. And Charley is a social fellow, — likes to gather his friends around him. He lives like a prince, from all I can gather; gives entertainments every week, whose only drawback is that there's no lady to preside. Margaret, it will be just the place for you; you will be princess, Margaret."

"When is the wedding to take place?" asked Margaret.

"In a month."

"Poor Robert!" she sighed to herself; "he thinks marriage will change that frivolous nature."

"You haven't told Sarah, I suppose," she went on.

"No; is there any particular need for my doing so?"

"She might feel slighted; you know she is peculiar and notional."

"Suppose you tell her. And, by the way, what do we need? What new furniture, I mean?"

"None, that I know of. Your wife will have my rooms; they are the prettiest; they may need new carpets, but that is all."

"I'll look at them," said Robert, going out; and the old, lonely feeling came back to Margaret. One by one the sister and the brothers had slipped away from her side, and she had nobody to take their place.

"How foolish I am!" she exclaimed, dashing away the tears that filled her eyes; "haven't I Charley's child left?"





CHAPTER VII.

THE MINISTER'S COMFORTER.



WHEN Robert had fairly gone, Sarah opened the door and planted herself in her own place. Margaret felt it obligatory upon her to tell Sarah of the threatened changes in the family she had served so faithfully; and yet she dreaded to begin the conversation. So she chatted about the garden, the crops, Indian bread and baked potatoes, the fruit for supper, rubbing the silver, until Sarah bluntly put the question which had been itching on her tongue-tip for half an hour.

"Well, when is it coming off?"

Margaret was thinking of something else just then, and looked blankly up.

"The wedding, child; you don't think I'm blind, do you?"

"In a month, so Robert says."

"Oh, the fool!" muttered Sarah, between her teeth.

"I can't have you call him such a name, Sarah. He sees only her good qualities; besides, he loves her, and she may make him a good wife."

"Good qualities!" sniffed Sarah. "I wonder what they are? Good wife! That dead tree out o' my bedroom window may bear fruit, but it don't seem likely to. You're not pleased with it any better than I am. What are *you* going to do?"

"I? Going away."

"Of course; you couldn't stand it here. But where under the light o' the sun are you going?"

Margaret laughed at the woman's earnestness.

"No matter about me," she said, evasively.

"It wouldn't be if you only had grace, Miss Margaret," said Sarah; "wanting that, you want everything. But I don't despair yet. The Lord has got you in leading-strings, and you'll come out some day a bright and shining light; mark my words. But if you think of leaving, why, good-by, Mossy Bank! I'm not going to stay."

"O Sarah!" and Margaret left her work, standing half way between the machine and the old serving-woman. "O Sarah, you haven't the heart to leave Robert!"

"No; heart and flesh will fail me, I dare to say; it often has, in my hard tussle with the world; but I'm not going to stay here, sure as that woman comes. She hates me, and if I wasn't a Christian mebbly I should hate her. I'll submit, cheerful, to them I love, more than a good deal; folks that knows me well knows

that. And don't you see, Mr. Robert himself don't want me ;" her hard voice faltered. "She'll bring her own help ; she's planning to, of course. Bless your dear heart, Miss Margaret ! *he'll* be just as glad to get me off as *she*. Haven't you thought of it that way yet? Don't you know it's always as the wife wants it?"

The keen-sighted old woman was right. Margaret knew that Lettie had no love for Sarah ; she had often said so.

"I'm not so bad off as I might be," continued Sarah. "There's plenty'll be glad to git me ; and I've put away a little money of my own. Me and Miss May would fight, I'm afraid, for the leaven of old Adam aint worked out o' me yet. What aint of grace is sure to be of Satan, and I think, sometimes, he keeps his little finger on me, though it's not of my allowing. So sure as I look up to my Master he takes it off. But, O Miss Margaret, it aint always easy to look up. Human flesh and sperit fails awfully sometimes.

You haven't told me yet where you are going?"

"To Charley."

Sarah turned pale.

"Good sakes, Miss Margaret!" she cried, "you've started the Scotch thrills along my back. My dreams aint much as a general thing, but last night I was standing at the edge of the little graveyard, when I thought a funeral came by. 'Whose is it, good man?' I asked of somebody standing near; and says he, 'It's Charley Ransom's.'—'I didn't know he'd got home,' said I. —'Yes, he has,' said he; and then I woke up."

"It was only a dream," said Margaret.

"That's true, child. I didn't tell you to worrit you; didn't think of it before you spoke of him. But what on earth set you out to go there, of all places? Child, how will you ever git over that great, wide, stormy ocean?"

"Go with me, Sarah. Think how delighted

Charley would be!" cried Margaret, eagerly. "Go with me, good Sarah, and take care of me. I need you more than anybody else."

Sarah drew up her check apron, and wiped her eyes vigorously. It was like seeing rills spring out of parched deserts, to see Sarah weep. She dried her eyes soon, however, and after a few moments' abandonment to her feelings:—

"I've tosted you in these arms, child, when you was a mite so small that you wasn't scarcely the burden of a feather; but I can't go; no, I can't go."

"Why can't you, Sarah?" asked Margaret. She had sunk down at the old woman's knees, and her hands were folded on Sarah's lap. The woman gave her eyes a vigorous rub, and replied, briefly, by one word, that had all the solemn weight of a final negative:—

"Tommy!"

"I've come right on a tableau," cried a merry

voice ; " do excuse me, but I couldn't help seeing."

Sarah, with a rapid gesture, hurried into the kitchen, upsetting sundry things as she went.

"Sarah is as queer as ever," laughed Lettie. "I'm sure we never could get along together. I just stepped in the window, here, finding the door fast. Dear me ! what piles of linen, and how well you look with color ! I wish it became me. What a pretty room ! I never was in it before. It ought to be a parlor ; I hate parlors upstairs. How do you contrive to keep so nice with only Sarah ?"

"She is a host in herself," said Margaret, "and we put out the washing."

Margaret took her visitor over the house, and took copious notes of her suggestions.

Robert was delighted when he heard who had been there.

"Some girls would have resented your not calling, Maggie," he said.

"I should have preferred a more delicate manœuvre," thought Margaret; "and besides, dear, simple soul that you are, why should any one try to deceive you?"

"I can't bear a Bible staring me in the face wherever I go," Lettie had said, finding one in every room.

"We were brought up so," said Margaret.

"I know; but I abominate everything that is old foggyish. Don't look at me as if you were frightened," she added. "The Bible isn't so very sacred; ask your brother John."

Margaret shrank away at that, covered with confusion. Had John been a stumbling-block in the path of this silly woman?

Margaret thought this all over as she talked with Robert. Presently Sarah came in, saying that she saw Mr. Winthrop walking down street and guessed he was coming in.

"What's the matter?" laughed Robert; "how her jaws are set! You've told her, I suppose."

"Yes," said Margaret.

"And she won't stay ; well, I shan't coax her. Lettie and I have talked it over. Lettie must be suited, you know."

"Certainly, Robert," his sister replied ; though it made her heart ache to witness his cool unwrapping of old ties and throwing them from him. "Your wife's comfort should be your first thought. But I fancied Mr. Winthrop was coming in."

"So did I," said Sarah, placing a basket of currants on the table. "He came to the gate and unlatched it, then shut it again and went on."

"So we shan't have him to tea," Robert said, seating himself.

Yes, the minister went on, with a heavy heart beating languidly under his black coat. This good man felt that even the simple duties of a country parish were almost too much for him.

I am inclined to believe some clergymen take

it for granted that God has left the world upon their shoulders, and that for all the sins and shortcomings of those under their charge they are responsible. So they groan instead of rejoicing, and fear instead of trusting. They forget that they are co-workers with him, — that their duty is to sow the seed, to till the ground, to water and to watch it, leaving God to take care of the crops.

The peace and beauty of Mossy Bank had tempted him for a moment to go in and rest; but he remembered Margaret's words, — that if she wanted to talk of "these things" she would send for him, — and the thought arrested his steps, and sent him homeward without the cup of tea that might have refreshed him so much. He stooped as he walked and held his hands behind him. His grave, sweet mouth worked with some inward agitation. In his Book of Thoughts he had, that morning, entered the following: —

"*Item.* To talk with my people more about their souls, going from house to house ; to strive to counteract the loose opinions that are making sad havoc in the church of Christ."

He had had a discouraging day of it. Some had treated his ministrations with levity, others accused him of impertinence, because he was on his Master's business.

He hindered the blacksmith's wife, — for even clergymen do not always choose the right time to administer wholesome truths, — and felt her black looks at his back, as he went away, even through his broadcloth. One old reprobate, of whom Christians said, "his case is too desperate for any remedy," swore at him with such refinement of blasphemy that he was fain to put his hands over his ears to escape his insane curses.

The doctor's wife had received him with oily suavity, and hedged his way so completely with her small talk that he was glad to get release.

The grocer's lady, as she called herself, came

down with all her children, — there were seven of them, — dressed in gorgeous apparel; and, when he proposed prayer, I am sorry to say that she slyly pinched the baby, and that small piece of humanity refused to be comforted.

Thus the enemy of souls threw stumbling-blocks in his way, from morning till night, and when he would have stopped at Mossy Bank, as I said before, he thought of his last visit, — how he had tried to speak of his Master, and had been repelled.

"I have set myself to this duty," he said, "and, unless I can speak with perfect freedom, I will deny myself the pleasure of going in."

It was a denial, — he did not care to think how great. He had often thought of this brother and sister — of their long line of godly ancestors.

"They are generally in their pew at church," he said; "they look devout, they listen — but do they hear? And his heart went up in fer-

vent supplication that none of his flock might be missing when his crown should be given him.

Little he knew how God had honored him in his laborious work of self-denial.

The blacksmith's wife, a notorious scold, thought over what he had said; and, in consequence, treated her husband so kindly when he came home, that he stayed away from the public house that night.

The old reprobate, who had sent all the fiends after him, cursed and thought, and thought and cursed, till he broke out into tears and wailings, and called himself a sinful old wretch, and made a feeble promise to himself to try and be a better man.

The doctor's wife, though she was shallow-brained, was led to reflect upon her aimless life, and actually read a prayer that night, though she concealed the book in a copy of Shakespeare so that her husband might not suspect.

The grocer's "lady" decided that, as the minister had called, it would be but common politeness to take a pew, and — the children would look so pretty all sitting in a row. She was a proud, affectionate mother, with all her vanity. Her nurslings were her jewels; they might be the means of her salvation.

One never does work for Christ but what the reward is sure to come in good, sterling gold, fresh and shining from the bank of heaven. God never forgets. A word spoken in his fear, a line sung to his glory, — provided it is done from sincere hearts, — he will surely record in the book of his remembrance.

So the minister felt that he was conscious of striving to do the will of Him who had sent him; whether he had used the right means or not he could not decide.

Half a mile from his own home a little crooked cabin stood by the roadside ornamented with luxuriant vines. The few windows shone

with cleanliness, and the two rooms within were as neat as hands could make them.

This was the home of an old negro, whose name was Pompey Brown. For over forty years he had lived in that spot. His little patch of vegetables served him for food the year through; and he had famous broods of chickens. He was upwards of eighty, he said; preached every Sunday to a few of his black brethren, and made himself generally useful in the way of carting small parcels through the week.

Shrivelled and wrinkled, yet picturesque, he rarely failed to attract the attention of visitors, who often gave him money.

He sat in his doorway, to-night, watching his chickens that were perched about everywhere. His head was ornamented with a crimson fez, which Robert Ransom had given him; a bright blue cotton handkerchief decorated his neck, and a red shirt, open at the throat, disclosed

a bust of polished ebony, and set off the dark blue trowsers that stopped short of his bare feet and ankles.

He lifted his fez, by its ounce of tarnished tassel, as the minister paused, bowed with the gravity of a judge, and then sat bolt upright with a smiling countenance.

"Well, Pomp, how goes the world with you?" the minister asked, removing his hat and wiping his heated forehead.

"De world alleys go just right for me, sir," replied the man, respectfully.

"And you never have any trouble about it?"

"Nebber, sir; on'y thing that troubles me is Pomp hisself."

"Then you're not always satisfied with yourself?"

"Nebber, sir; Pomp is a mighty hard person to git along wid. I has to humor him sometimes," he added, with a shrewd look.

"How do you humor him, pray?"

"By 'scusing him," said the black, "and bein' patient wid his follies."

"But ought you to excuse him?" asked the minister, anxious to get at his views.

"Well, sir, I thinks I had, on account of bein' de Lord's property."

The minister opened his eyes at this simple logic.

"In consequence," continued the black, "you can't be too hard on what de Lord owns."

"But you don't allow him to commit sin on that account."

"Oh, no, sir; certainly not, sir," said Pomp, with a radiant face, "never 'lows dat. I alleys punishes him wid de weepens of prayer, and I makes him git down humble in de dust; but still, for all dat, I's tender wid him. I stinguishes 'tween his poor human nature and his speritual nature, and *I makes some allowances*. When I's a bad spell ob de rheumatiz, I's awful

tetchy and growly, and den I makes allowances, cause de body is hard on de soul sometimes."

"Well, I don't know but you are right," said the minister, thoughtfully, who remembered his many flagellations of conscience, when, ill in body and mind, he had come short of his duty.

"De Lord speaks majestical here," said the negro, rising, and waving his hand.

In truth, the Lord did speak majestical; for the view from the little twisted house was like a section of paradise. All that warmth of color, rich tinting, wonderful grace of undulating pasture-land, and kingly glory of hills, crowned to their summits with foliage, could impart to a landscape, was observable here. Mr. Winthrop felt rested as he gazed upon it; the view was one he often saw from his own study window.

He and Pomp and the grand works of the Almighty, — they seemed all of the world just now. His cares rolled off, his sorrows were forgotten.

"I have been too hard upon myself," he said, under his breath; "like this good man here, I must make due allowances. I must 'stinguish between my poor human nature and my spiritual nature;" he smiled as he recalled the quaint idiom; he almost loved it.

In the light of the lovely sunset the annoyances of the day were forgotten. Heaven seemed near, as they looked upon the golden gates of its glory, slowly shutting out the day. A soft lustre fell upon the climbing vines, and the velvety grass in front of the negro's cabin. The subdued noise of the insect world, the occasional crooning of the feathered creatures around, the quiet happiness that beautified the black face beside him, — all these things made him happier.





CHAPTER VIII.

"IT'S GLORY ! GLORY !"



'S no care at all, Mr. Winthrop," Pomp broke out, suddenly. "I's given everything to de Lord, everything."

"Then you are a happy man, Pomp."

"Yes, I's reasonably happy, right straight along," was the reply. "I takes it de Lord Jesus meant what he said when he tole us just put *all* our burdens on his blessed back ; reckon he means it for Pomp as well as the rest ;" and his black face shone almost like that of an angel.

"Pomp, you don't know how much good you

have done me," exclaimed the minister, taking the hand of his black brother.

"Dat's somethin' more to praise de Lord for," said Pomp, smiling. "Don't let your heart git crumpled up wid car'; remember de blessed promises, and may de Lord bless and preserve you, an' give you the rich rewards of his Holy Spirit. Amen."

"Amen," echoed the minister; and he felt that a hallowed benediction had been given him. He left the old man sitting in the midst of his vines, and went home.

A plain, unpretending edifice was that home, — old, weather-stained, seamed with sprouting yellow moss, and ridged with many a green spot of thatch. The front porch was covered with English ivy; and the door-stone was sunken, and worn to a wonderful lustre, by the feet of many generations.

It was situated on the southern slope of the old Ransom farm. From its western front the

ancient family mansion stood in full view, in all the glory of massive window, pointed roof, and sombre shading.

The house in which the minister now lived, had, in earlier days, been occupied by the man of business, — the steward of the Ransoms; and the minister, delighted with the beauty of the situation, had chosen it for his parsonage, and installed his sister — a delicate girl — as his house-keeper.

After his frugal supper, he came out on the porch with his little household, — Tim, a handsome Maltese, who always made her resting-place at his feet, and Birdie, who was not a canary, but his little lame sister, a girl with a gentle, tender face, and brown eyes that always lighted up at sight of the minister.

"Birdie, I'm going to write a good sermon to-morrow, if the Lord please," said the minister, seating himself in his rustic chair.

"I am glad to hear you say that, Ruby,"

replied the girl; "when you are desponding it seems almost impossible for you to help others along."

"Yes, that's my failing — lack of faith," he said, slowly. "My name should have been Thomas, — doubting Thomas, — it is so hard for me to cut loose from myself. But I have had a lesson, to-day, that I shall remember. Anything new, Birdie?"

"Yes; fourteen new chickens," laughed Birdie, showing her greatest beauty, — teeth like pearls.

"Fourteen!" he held up astonished hands. "Why, you'll soon have as large a colony as our old black friend, Pomp."

"And what have you heard?" asked Birdie, drawing her seat nearer to him so that her arm rested on his knee.

"Nothing, dear; at least — oh, yes; our friend of Mossy Bank, Mr. Robert Ransom, is going to be married shortly."

"Valed! I hope he will get a good wife, he is such a fine, noble-looking man. But his sister, Miss Margaret, oh! she is the most lovely woman I ever saw — such a calm, grand face!"

"She ought to know you, little one, you are such an enthusiast in her praise."

"She wouldn't care for me," said the girl, a slight shade of sadness resting on her face. "She, a beauty, and rich — and poor little me — no, no!" and she sighed wearily.

"Birdie, you are too sensitive; you must try and conquer this moody feeling; you're the dearest, sweetest girl alive."

"To you, Ruby. I know you love me; thank God! You have proved it in a thousand ways since dear mother died. Yes, I know I am too sensitive; I try to conquer it; I pray all the time against it. And as to Miss Margaret Ransom, she is very proud, and very beautiful; but some time she and I may be friends. But I

see the 'thinking' look in your eyes ; I will be very quiet."

She laid her head on his knee, looking, in her fragile, delicate beauty, very like a little child.

Reuben Winthrop thought to some purpose, sitting there with his handkerchief thrown over his head.

Now and then lights flitted from window to window of the old farm-house, which stood there in the fading light of day, like a picture, its pointed roof against the dying crimson of the cloudless sky. One by one the holy stars came out ; the lowing of the cows grew fainter ; the crickets' chirp sounded shriller ; and the fire-flies lit their little lamps and twinkled in and out of the long grass, and still the brother and sister sat silently in the little west porch, — one communing with nature the other with nature's God.

Sunday came, and with it a sermon from Reuben Winthrop that pricked the people to

their hearts. Never was anything so powerful heard in that parish before, they said.

Miss Lettie May was there, richly attired, and vain of her beauty. The Mays' pew had been newly lined with real damask, with which Lettie's exquisitely gloved hand made a pretty contrast. The Ransoms' pew was near that of the minister, and Margaret, with her lovely face, and quiet colors, was listening as if for her life. But thoughts of India, and Charley, and Charley's little child, would intrude.

"What did you think of the sermon?" she asked, when, seated beside her brother in his new carriage, they were driving home.

"Rather better than usual, wasn't it?" he replied. "Fine face Winthrop has when it is lighted up. But that sister of his — a mite of a creature, and lame, isn't she? Lettie told me something about it."

"Poor little thing!" said Margaret, softly; "she always seems like a timid child to me, so

tiny and quiet! How lonely she must be, all by herself! I never thought of it before."

Her heart yearned as she recalled the pale, sweet face, with its almost preternaturally bright eyes. She remembered how steadily they were fixed upon her brother.

"He must be a good brother," she thought; and glanced at Robert, absorbed and smiling, quite ignoring his sister's presence for the moment.

The deeper feelings that had been awakened by the sermon passed off with the day, and Margaret sat absorbed in bright dreams of her forthcoming voyage as usual. Her work was all done, and she hoped to start the week after her brother's marriage.

At last the eventful day arrived. The bride looked interesting, as all brides do. Margaret contrived to keep her face masked in smiles; though the rebellious tears were ready, at any

moment, to break through all the restraints of etiquette.

"You will be here on our return, Maggie," said Robert, as he took her hand at parting. "You won't start till then. I couldn't forgive you if you did."

He felt that her hand was icy cold.

"I shall probably be here when you return, Robert," was all she said.

"I wish you were going," he murmured, regretfully. In his great joy he could not forget what she had been to him.

"No, dear; you ought to go alone. Don't mind my shivering; it's excitement, not cold. Good-by, Lettie; take good care of each other;" and she was standing wistfully alone, when the few guests were gone, Sarah, near her, gazing with solicitude upon the child of her affections.

"Well, it's over!" exclaimed the latter, with something like a sigh; "and I aint sorry. Now all we've got to do is to go our different ways.

I suppose the Lord sees what's best for us poor humans ; but I did think, awhile ago, that I was planted for life. I wouldn't have cared, Miss Maggie," she continued, turning squarely round, "if he'd got some sensible body for a wife ; but such a little fool ! oh, dear !"

"You let your tongue run away with you, Sarah," said Margaret, smiling. "How can you call any person a fool with the Bible precept before you?"

"Well," muttered Sarah, "she aint my sister, as I know of; but 'praps I *am* too quick. What's in must come out, if I have to be sorry for it. Do look ! there comes black Pomp."

"I's too late," said Pomp, as he neared the two women.

"Yes ; but we are glad to see you, Pomp," said Margaret.

"I's too late wid my offering. 'Twas all de ole man could give," he said, producing, from some mysterious hiding-place, a pair of snow-

white bantams, the most beautiful creatures of their kind, Margaret thought, that she had ever seen.

"I's got no silver or gold, Miss Margaret; but I's taken de greatest pains wid raring dese yer, 'cause to my mind white is de snowy emblem of innocence. Dey's cl'ar white; an' as, in de old time ob de Jews, dey didn't give anything for de altar, widout 'twas fa'r and good, all through, so I offers dese up on de altar of dis sacrament, widout spot or blemish, or any sech thing, miss."

"They are very beautiful," said Margaret, softly, as Sarah, with a kindly smile, took them from the old black hands. "Robert shall see them the first thing when he comes home. I am sure he will prize them."

The old man's eyes shone with pleasure.

"T'ank you, miss; I's proud an' happy. De Lord shine on thar pathway, and make it brighter an' brighter to the perfec' day. I

hopes nothing better for him, Miss Marg'ret, but that he'll find de sperit ob de Lord some day; I's praying for it. De chile of so many prayers, and 'scendant of so many good men, can't be lost; dars no gospil for it."

"You must pray for us both, uncle," said Margaret, her voice unsteady.

He stood looking at her for a moment, in her cloud-like dress, with undisguised admiration.

"'Taint told, nowhar, but angels has strayed from dar hebbenly habitation," he said, in his low, musical utterance. "Ob course, in straying down, dey gets dar wings heavy wid the dew, an' dar clean robes draggled troo de mire. Dey can't help it, Miss Marg'ret, if dey don't have HIS sign in dar for'heads. I's but a poor ole sarvint, mos' home, t'anks to his name, but if my pore prayers'll lift ye a little step up de ladder, t'wards de MANSION, ye shall hab 'em, Miss Marg'ret."

"Indeed I do need your prayers," she murmured, tearfully.

"Jes' yo' remember," he said, clasping her hand in his trembling old fingers, "HE's de Rock of Ages! he's de light ob de world! My pore tongue fails an' trembles; my ole heart's too full for utterance; it's glory, miss, it's glory! it's glory!"

His thin lips trembled. It was glory, -- the glory of a life hid with Christ in God, reflected in his countenance, silvering his voice, quivering amid the wrinkles of that aged black face.

Margaret had never felt so awed in her life. Some way the black presence faded, and a shining angel seemed standing there.

He said no more, let her hand unclasp lingeringly, lifted his hat, bade his adieus, still in a seemingly tranced state, and walked slowly down the path.

All day long the words echoed in Margaret's ears : —

"It's glory, miss, it's glory ! it's glory !"

"There's no use in shutting my eyes to the fact that some power makes that old man very happy," she said to herself. "But why don't I feel at rest? satisfied, when I try so hard to do right?"





CHAPTER IX.

A MORNING CALL.

STRANGE that I don't get a word from Charley!" so Margaret said for the twentieth time. It was three weeks since Robert had gone on his bridal tour.

Margaret had become impatient, what with her rigid, self-imposed striving to live a Christian life, and the longing to fly from scenes that were becoming more and more distasteful to her.

Robert's letters had been very pleasant. Everybody seemed happy, gay, and at peace, except her poor miserable self.

"Watched kittles never biles," said Sarah, as Margaret expressed her regret. "Wait's a bird that flies in the air, but sometimes he settles. Don't be impatient, Miss Maggie, everything comes to an end. I'm thinking of buying a bit of a house. I could sell milk, and sister and Tommy could live with me. You know Mr. Robert'll be home soon with his wife. My boy won't come back so happy as he went away; but I won't prophesy no evil."

"We must try and make the best of it, Sarah," said Margaret; and before she knew it, almost, her face was in her hands and she was crying.

"I won't be so weak," she said, a moment after, dashing the tears away. "Shall I never get over my babyish habits?"

"Good thing for you, Miss Margaret; but I tell you what: you're nervous, and low-spirited; and you don't seem to see what sweet, fine weather is slipping from under your feet. Go

put your hat on, like a good girl, and take a long walk. S'pose you call at the farm and order some eggs; we're almost out, and there's no use trying to keep house 'thout eggs. Tell Miss Huldy, or whatever her foreign name is, that the butter wasn't salt enough last time."

"I've a great mind to," said Margaret, wearily.

"Well, then, if you've a great mind to, put a little will to, and wind yourself up. You're like a clock that's almost down, and unsartin in its motions."

Margaret went upstairs, giving a groan or two at her own inertness, leaving Sarah punishing the pie-crust; for, when excited, she laid things about, and every time she thought of Robert's marriage it made her tingle to her toes with an irritable impatience.

Sarah was a good woman, but she had experienced religion very late in life, — too late for the correction of some habits that had grown

up with her from childhood. But, in her case, grace conquered nature, for she was always heartily ashamed and sorry for any unusual outburst.

It was one of the loveliest days of the year. The balmy August wind kissed the earth, and the great swathes of corn bent before it with a kind of worship. It melted the thin clouds from the azure of the sky, and dried the countless dew-drops from the emerald covering of the hills. Short and crisp, needing rain a little, the bright grass and mosses crackled under her feet.

Even the narrow, dry ditches, the seams in the baked earth, the fences with gaps in them, the little cottages, here and there, running over with healthy children, the ruminating cows, standing in groups under shady trees, — everything seemed veiled with a gentle beauty which touched Margaret's heart.

If she had known of good old Pomp's method, she might have "scused herself a little;" for

brain and body had been drooping since Robert went away.

She had spent half her nights in thinking, and her dreams prevented refreshing sleep. She was eager to get away that Robert's wife might be sole mistress of the situation. And yet of all the future she was certain of nothing, — not even of the future beyond this life, — she sometimes said, bitterly.

She met Mr. Winthrop on the road, and exchanged a pleasant greeting. Seeing him she bethought her of that little crippled sister, and said to herself that she would call there. Presently she came in sight of the pretty, old-fashioned cottage. A sweet, pale face looked through the morning glories that twined round the windows.

Margaret passed up the narrow walk, bordered with hollyhocks, and flowers of the gayer sort. The old knocker made a queer little vibrant noise.

All blushes and smiles, Birdie came to the door, — for the small servant was busy, — and ushered her into the cheerful little living-room. This was well furnished, — for Reuben had brought furniture with him. Its pretty Brussels carpet, and tinted chairs and tables, and handsome piano, gave a look of unusual comfort coupled with the low ceiling and quaint beauties.

“I ought to have called on you before,” said Margaret. “How cosey you look here! I remember this room, for I have spent many a happy hour here. There was a great eight-day clock in the corner, and a three-clawed mahogany table in the centre, with the old family Bible, covered with green baize, atop. Uncle Staff, as everybody called him, was the agent then, and he always called me ‘little daughter.’ The milk was always fresher here, and the bread sweeter, it seemed to me. Aunty Staff bought

me a high chair, at last, and I took up my quarters here half the time."

"Do you ever wish the days back again?" asked Birdie.

"Sometimes I catch myself longing for the same rustic pleasures, the careless hours, the innocence. But how is it with you, don't you get very lonely here?"

"Never," said Birdie, cheerfully. "Ruby is at home a great deal; and he is very tender of me."

It was simply spoken, but it gave rise to a queer sensation in Margaret's throat.

"Sometimes it seems as if he were too careful of my comfort," continued Birdie, her eyes smiling. "I wish he would get a wife."

"Oh, no," cried Margaret, impulsively; "you can't mean that."

"Yes, I do; I know I should love whoever Ruby chose. I know he would make a wise selection."

"Have you ever been over to the farm?" asked Margaret, thinking of Lettie with a pain at her heart.

"Yes, once; but only in the garden. Ruby took me there. Isn't Miss Rhoda queer? She wears such a high cap, with those enormous frills! but then, what a pretty brown face she has!"

"She is a French woman, and all her ways are foreign," replied Margaret; "a very smart, enterprising person to carry on that great farm so well."

"She's like a man," responded Birdie. "Sometimes I see her crossing the yard with pails and pans, and she steps out so! I can hear her too, when she is in earnest."

"Would you like to go over with me?" asked Margaret.

"Oh, very much," said Birdie, her face lighting up; "I have often wanted to see the house."



CHAPTER X.

IN THE OLD FARM-HOUSE.



“MRS MARGREET, welcome you!” cried a sharp voice, strongly accentuated, from the interior of the wide hall.

It came from the end of the passage; from the well-stored, well-kept pantry; and presently Mrs. Rhoda made her appearance, — a compact little body, with shoes whose soles made a great clattering as she walked, and a brown, quiet, almost handsome face with an apple-red in it. Her eyes were intensely black; they never twinkled; there was too much downright hard work in her life for that.

Her twinkling was all done with pails and pans and kettles. She was a manly little woman, — if such a phrase may be allowed, — full of sterling qualities.

"Stranger you, Mees Margreet; and you, Mees Winthrop. Will you have cake and milk?"

"No, thank you," said Margaret; "don't let us detain you a moment from your work. Send over some eggs, if you please, to-day, and salt the next butter a little more. Now may I go just where I please?"

"To be sure — just where you please, Mees Margreet — not that I can boast of the place, I have been worked so hard. Take your pleasure, Mees Margreet."

Margaret ascended the broad oak staircase, Birdie following slowly. At every step she took, some old memory thronged upon her.

"This was my room, she said, as they reached a pretty apartment at the head of the stairs.

"It looks like you," said Birdie, gravely.

Margaret laughed.

"Papa had this bow-window put in to please me." She threw open the shutters; the fragrance of flowers came in deliciously. Some roses still bloomed on the sturdy old climbing-bush, which, as far back as Margaret could remember, had hugged the red brick wall.

"This was my mother's room;" she threw open a door which led into a large, square chamber, whose high-post bedstead and antique upholstery was the fashion of a century before.

"What a lovely prospect!" said Birdie, looking from the window.

From where she stood much of the farm could be seen, rich in grain and fruit, and blossoming all over its seventy acres.

"This room is just as she left it," mused Margaret. "I was only fifteen when she died; but now I feel bowed down with years."

"You!" exclaimed the minister's sister, a look of wonder in her wide, brown eyes. "I

fancied you very happy as well as very young."

"I don't think I am happy, dear," said Margaret, gently; "and, as to my youth, it seems ages ago since I was a child."

They went back into Margaret's room.

"Excuse mees," said a voice; and Mrs. Rhoda stood before them, the apple-bloom in her cheeks deepened by exercise. In her hands she carried a little tray, covered with a napkin as white as snow, on which were borne cut-glass tumblers, filled to the brim with rich milk, and on two little plates, that Margaret had seen from her infancy, laid slices of appetizing sponge cake.

"How kind of you, Mrs. Rhoda!" said Margaret. "I didn't feel hungry, but I believe I do now."

"And Mr. Robert—you are expecting him. I hope he has a kind, true wife."

"I hope so indeed, Mrs. Rhoda," said Mar

garet, not quite sure of her voice. That curious depression came upon her at mention of her brother's name, so that she said to herself: —

"I hope he is not going to die!"

"If it were not that I am going away, Mrs. Rhoda," she added, a moment after, "I should like to come back here to my old home."

"Ah! how happy should I be!" cried the little woman, with true French vehemence, her black eyes shining. "You should have this, that," — pointing, — "ah! every part of the house. I live in my kitchen where the work is; but it would not be so lonesome with Mees Margreet in the house. My son is much away, seeing to the crops; he is not much good at home. And where are you going, Mees Margreet?"

"To India."

"That great, wicked ocean!" cried the woman, with a shrug. "Ah! I was there in a great storm. I never will risk my life again,

though I should like to see my friends, my countrie. I dread that wide ocean — that cruel sea. And you would come here, if it were not for that?"

"I should have nowhere else to go," said Margaret.

"And if HE designs it not," said Mrs. Rhoda, pointing up, "then you will come."

Margaret grew pale with sudden apprehension.

"Because," continued the woman, "it is not best to stay with young wives. I will please myself then to think you are coming."

"Oh, no, no!" Margaret replied, with vehemence; "I must go! I shall go!"

"If it is for the best," said the French woman, gravely.

"Now I must look at the old clock," said Margaret, trying to speak in a gay tone; "and then we will go."

They went downstairs again, passed by the

pantry, into the wide, cool kitchen, with its quaint, old-time fireplace, and yawning oven, dear to old country homes. A delightful, fruity odor of baked apples greeted them, — country kitchens always smell of the orchard. Ticking away against the wall stood the eight-day clock.

"The little ship, in the glass case overhead, that moves when the clock strikes, was one of the greatest wonders of my childhood," Margaret said.

"I think it wonderful now," said Birdie, smiling.





CHAPTER XI.

BAD NEWS FROM INDIA.



TOLD you to go, but I wish I hadn't," was Sarah's greeting, when Margaret reached home.

"Pray why?" Her cheek grew pale.

"Somebody's been here."

"Who was it?"

"There's his card."

Margaret's heart beat faster and faster; for thus read the card:—

"HENRY MILNER,

Calcutta."

"Why, what's the matter, child?" cried Sarah.

"It's — it's news from Charley."

"Well, you needn't faint away on that account. There! I'm glad to see your color coming back. The man looked like a wild Californian; he's all beard."

"There's the bell!" said Margaret, excitedly

Sarah disappeared, but presently came again a scared look in her eyes as she ushered the stranger in, and then shot back to the kitchen, murmuring, "He brings no good news, or my Scotch blood deceives me."

Margaret met the man with her always-cordial manner; but something in his grave countenance, his constrained glance, set her heart beating wildly again.

"I bring a letter," he said, apparently with an effort.

"From Charley?" cried Margaret, eagerly.

"No." He slowly took something from the

breast-pocket of his coat ; and Margaret, watching him, felt indescribably alarmed. All his motions were quiet ; and in his face a deep-seated sorrow could be read. In a hesitating way he held out the letter.

"It is sealed with black," murmured Margaret, in a voice of anguish ; and her hands fell nerveless. He looked at her with pity, still holding the letter.

"I — am quite calm," said Margaret, after a short pause ; "don't mind if I am pale ; I never faint."

"It is hard to be the bearer of such news," he said ; "I wish some other could have come."

"Charley is dead !" murmured Margaret ; "Charley is dead — dead !" Then she looked up hopelessly.

"You don't speak ; you don't even shake your head. O my noble, good brother — O Charley, Charley !"

"You were to return to India under my

charge," said the stranger, in a shaking voice ; then he stopped a moment to command himself.

"Yes," she answered, drearily ; "so Charley wrote me." All the world had slipped away from her. The worst that could happen had come. Oh, what a day !

She stretched out her trembling hand for the letter ; her eyes were hard and shining, her lips white.

"If I could have softened this news," he said, gently.

"You could not." She sat like one in a dream, drearily and unconsciously repeating, "You could not."

"If I can be of any service to you," he said. She shook her head.

"No one *can* be now."

He bade her good-by, and went softly away.

How long she sat there she did not know. She felt Sarah shaking her arm.

"Do wake up, Miss Margaret. Dear soul ! don't stare so wild at me ! What *is* the trouble ? What does that letter mean, on the floor, there — black !"

Margaret looked up into her horror-struck face, with an expression so hopeless that Sarah burst into tears. That seemed to bring Margaret to her senses. She stood up, threw her arms about the woman's neck, and, with one bitter cry, exclaimed : —

"O Sarah, Sarah, God has deserted me ! I have lost Charley."

"No, child, no," said the woman, holding her tenderly against her bosom ; "maybe he was never taking such care of you as he is this moment. If the waters is deep, HE'S in the waters, dear. Don't sob that way, and not a tear — don't sob so, sweet heart, don't."

"Tears, Sarah, they would scald my eyes," moaned Margaret. "Oh, I am utterly desolate ! Charley is dead — think, Sarah ;" and she



"O, Sarah, Sarah, God has deserted me." — Page 120.

looked wanly in her eyes — "Charley is dead."

"No, no, dear, Charley is living; the soul is alive, Margaret."

"And what is that to me, now?" cried Margaret, passionately; "I only know that I shall never see him again. We won't talk now, Sarah, good Sarah; you have always been good to me, Sarah."

This was too much for tender-hearted Sarah. She burst into tears, and kissed her, saying, "I've done that often when you were a wee-bit girl, and I do it now to show you that my heart aches for you." Then she left the room.

"I felt it coming," she murmured, stumbling about the kitchen, blind with tears. "I won't say nothin'; I'll hold my tongue, though it does seem a dreadful dark providence to poor human nature. Just as she's lost this home, too. What'll the child do now? And she'd made

up her mind to go — got all ready — and here is the end of it. Well, life's a queer tangle, anyhow; just as you think you've got all the knots out, snap goes the thread."





CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST LETTER.

THE letter proved to have been written by Charley's business partner. It stated that Mr. Ransom died by the accidental upsetting of a boat; that preparations were being made to send his little child to America; and ended thus : —

"Mr. Ransom has left his child a fair fortune, and you will probably see her some time in November. She will start in the 'Bermuda,' with a native nurse, who cannot be induced to part with the little girl.

"I enclose the last lines your brother ever

wrote, as the contents indicate that it was to be sent to you."

Margaret read like one in a dreadful dream. She kissed the letter, and, bowing over it, sobbed those fearful, dry sobs that appeal so terribly to the heart of the looker-on.

There was nobody to look on here save the strong angel whose piercing eyes read her soul, and pitied her sorrow.

She had shut herself in, and with Charley's picture before her, with a forced calmness, she made the attempt to read the now solemn words of one who spoke from the dead.

"DEAREST SISTER MARGARET:—I fancy you are very busy getting ready to come to me. I dreamed you *had* come, last night, and that I was the happiest fellow alive. My only trouble was that I could not give you anything to eat, —every delicacy mysteriously disappearing as

soon as I stretched out my hand to present it to you.

"Don't bring a large wardrobe; there are oceans of pretty things out here, waiting your matchless taste. I have my eye on some of them, fair as lilies in bloom, — apple-greens, and soft, rich grays, your colors, you know.

"I get impatient to see you. As for my little one, I think you and she will be fast friends. At present she seems to care only about her nurse, — a smart lady, and a devoted one. I half fear she has made the child a worshipper of Sheve already. She is the strangest little one, that pet of mine; I never know how to take her. Alas! she needed a mother's guiding hand; she needs yours. I am sure my poor little one will improve under your care. I know you will love Mary's child.

"There will be a jubilee when you come. My friends all feel an interest in you, because you are my sister. My home is given up to

Indian servants. I think I need you more than any of the rest.

"Margaret, I am a little sad to-day. Nine years ago, on the morning of the thirtieth, little Margaret was born, and my Mary died. I think she carried my heart with her. I shall never cease to remember her tenderly.

"Still, as I recall her looks, her words, there comes over me —"

And that was the last line his hand ever penned.

The last word!

The willing fingers put aside the pen, — some communication, some trifling matter of business, some sudden thought occurring. It laid there on the painted rack never to be lifted by his fingers any more. Did no chill give warning that his life's work was done? Did he go laughing, with merry words upon his lips, to the pretty craft that became his coffin?

Margaret sat there, like a statue, her eyelids pressed hard on her hot palms.

Another hopeful, happy dream was over. Another idol shattered.

"Can it be God?" she murmured; "and does he think I can love one who makes failure and mockery of my life?"

"Oh, I am growing hard!" she cried, after another pause; "hard and ungrateful. There is nothing for me to lean upon—nothing. The heavens are as brass above my head. Robert has failed me, John has failed me, and now Charley has gone, his work only half accomplished."

Suddenly a ray of light stole through the blackness of her despair:—

Charley's child! her brother's motherless little girl!

The thought softened her; she could not be utterly alone. Charley's child, and her namesake, would nestle in her bosom,—look up to

her with her father's eyes. She was, perhaps, already on her way, and, if God did not take her—she started at the ingratitude of the thought—she might be happy yet.

She went to the window. The grand, majestic calm of nature soothed her. The hills, in their lovely beneficence, seemed to say :—

“I would comfort you if I could.”

The grain, turning yellow in the autumn sunshine ; the trees, hoary with age ; the little graveyard — oh ! Charley would never lie there.

Margaret's tears began to flow for the first time, and her heated brain grew cool again.

When Sarah came up, some hours afterward, she found her asleep.

“Poor dear, how sad she looks !” she whispered. “But, then, there's comfort in the thought that I aint going to lose her, after all.”



CHAPTER XIII.

A WOMAN OF THE WORLD.

ROBERT RANSOM, very much against his will, was plunged in the gayeties of city life. Lettie led him at her own sweet will. To-night, it was the theatre; to-morrow night, the opera; the next, a ball; matinées came nearly every day, and Lettie pouted charmingly if her husband hinted at her need of a little rest.

"I'm used to it, dear," she said; "of course I can't give up everything all at once, and become an old woman. You mustn't expect that."

So Robert ceased expecting, and tried to

think that he enjoyed himself because Lettie did.

He was not looking for the painful news that came so suddenly, shocking him to his heart's centre.

Lettie was preparing for a fancy ball. Her role was Undine; and her costume one of the richest that money could procure.

He sat in an easy-chair in his parlor at the hotel, trying to pass the time away; thinking of his sister Eleanor's home-like home; longing for old Salem, its quiet and comfort again. Suddenly he bethought himself.

"I forgot Maggie's letter," he said, starting up; "I'll read it now."

He took the missive from his pocket, whispering softly to himself. As he opened the letter, and his eye ran hurriedly over its contents, the light in his face faded quite out. He leaned forward, pushing the hassock from under his

foot. His chest labored, his cheek grew pale, for this is what he read : —

“O Robert, dear Robert, Charley is dead ; our Charley, drowned ! The news came to-day, and I am nearly distracted.”

All his love for his youngest brother came welling up in his heart. He read the lines over and over, and still could not bring himself to believe. He had looked for a reunion with Charley before many years, and death had come silently in, and dashed all his pleasant expectations.

“Charley dead !” he repeated again and again, and then he walked the floor a little, and then great anguish swelled his bosom, and he caught his breath with a sob.

“Poor Margaret !” he said, with pitying voice, “everything fails her.”

He passed slowly and unwillingly upstairs. For the first time he dreaded to meet his wife.

Lettie looked up. She had nearly completed her toilet.

"How long he is shutting the door," she said to herself. He came forward; she was frightened at his white face. He placed the letter in her hand.

"O Robert! isn't it sad?" was her first ejaculation; "but then," — she hesitated, — "you haven't seen him for years, have you?"

"No."

"It can't be quite so hard to bear, then, of course."

"I loved him as dearly, Lettie, as if he had been here all his life."

The woman's face clouded. Was there no sympathy in her heart for her husband in that trying moment?

"Of course, you'll give up the party, Lettie," he said, hoarsely, for he read her face with sad misgivings.

"I wish the letter hadn't come till to-morrow," she murmured, pettishly.

"Lettie!" there was pain in his voice.

"I had so set my heart on going, and my dress cost so much, — nothing ever became me so well, — and now of course it is useless. People needn't know."

Robert flashed with anger, as well as grief. In that moment Lettie's wings fell off, and her husband saw the hollowness of her nature.

"And you wish to go?" he asked, sternly.

"Of course I wish to."

"Would you dance to-night, if your mother was dead?"

"Don't, Robert; how awful! — a mother and a brother are two different persons," she said, her voice trembling. "You are cruel."

"And what are you, who would ask me to go to this place, when you know how my heart is bleeding?" He took her hand, he spoke tenderly, and, trembling, she asked: —

"Couldn't *I* go?"

"No!" He threw her hand from him, and turned away. "Since you force me to say it, I *forbid* your going," he added.

She looked after him. There was something terrible in his face,—a bitter grief for more than the loss of Charley.

Perhaps she felt in that moment that she had lost something which she could never regain. If she did, she covered the feeling with pride, threw her jewels in a drawer, and wept for an hour.





CHAPTER XIV.

CHARLEY'S LITTLE CHILD.



THE "Bermuda" had been a week at sea. Among the passengers were Charley Ransom's orphan child, and her nurse. The little girl had quietly accepted the situation, content if she might be with her beloved ayah. After the first wild, outburst of anguish over her father's death, she became silent and moody.

A sumptuous state-room had been given the child and her nurse. There were but a few passengers, and they were anxious to make friends with the silent little girl.

Alga was the name of the nurse, who had left

home and country for the love she bore the little one.

On the first day out this native woman stood on the deck, — thin to emaciation, her great, dark, melancholy eyes burning with a strange fire, — stately as a queen, gazing wistfully back to the shores she should never see again.

As she watched them fading, moment by moment, an expression passed over her wrinkled features, seeming to indicate that henceforth life was to be a burden, lightened only by the love of this child, whom she worshipped, — little Ida, with the golden hair.

The child stood beside her, clinging to her garments, speaking to no one, resenting in an unchildish manner any attempt that the passengers made to be familiar with her.

She was very small of her age, and the friends of her father had removed the tasteful Indian costume she had always worn, and robed her in deep black to her ankles; so that,

in spite of her floating, gold-tinged hair, and delicate features, she looked decidedly and grotesquely old.

She had gathered her thick curls in one hand to keep them from flying over her face. Her nurse looked down on her now and then, and her deep love made her smile beautiful.

"Why do you keep looking back, *Alga*?" asked the child, in Hindostanee.

"For my life, child," was the slow reply. "It began there, and on those shores it has ended."

"But you are alive," said the child, tremblingly.

"*Alga* is not here," was the answer, — "only her form, her face, her voice; the soul is *there*;" and she stretched out her dark hands, pleadingly.

The child hid her face, like one frightened, in the woman's garments.

"See, dear," said the nurse, still in that

strange tongue, "Alga has come back; she is here, to live for her darling."

With a glad cry the little Ida threw herself into the arms of her nurse. Her face lighted into beauty; she called the woman by every endearing name, and seemed almost beside herself with pleasure.

The passengers did not take kindly to the child; and even the captain, after trying in every way to win her good graces, gave it up and left her to herself.

The nurse and the child clung to each other, and the poor child never noticed the changes going on in that wrinkled face. It was lovelier to her than the most beautiful countenance,—the only thing she had to love and cling to.

Failing visibly though she was, the old Indian struggled against her weakness, and came upon deck every day with her charge.

Sometimes the passengers tried their best to make friends with Ida; but the child repelled all

their advances, so that in time she became an object of dislike, and they pleased themselves with teasing her, to bring the wild look into her great eyes, and to hear her scold in her native Hindostanee. Though she talked English, she seemed to prefer the language in which her nurse always spoken.

She often went by herself and sat, her white arms folded over her knees in utter silence, for long periods.

"She can't be a fool," the captain's wife said, angrily, one day; "fools never have such eyes."

Some one offered her a picture-book. She looked it through greedily, then turned away.

"Why don't you read it?" asked the lady.

"I don't know how," was the laconic reply.

"Not know how to read!—you, a great girl nine years old! For shame!" and then with flashing eyes the child sprang away, and went to pour her sorrows into the bosom of her nurse.

"All white people are cruel and wicked," was the consolation she got. "They hate us Indians. You will find them all alike."

"Even my Aunt Margaret?"

"Yes, child; she, too, hates us, and hates our religion. Some of them would kill you, for worshipping Sheve."

"They might kill me," said the child, defiantly. "I would still worship him. I hate all the white people I have seen; but" — with a thoughtful look — "my papa was white, — I am white."

"But your papa was different from the rest. He had lived years in India. You are different; your worship is different; your soul is Indian, — never forget that."

On such nourishment as this had the child been reared since her earliest infancy. In nothing was she American but her blood.

"You ought to have a doll to play with," one of the passengers said to her, finding her

crouching down by the mast, looking wistfully out to sea.

"I am not a baby," she said, proudly.

"You are not much more, you conceited little thing," was the retort.

"I am a lady," replied the child, rising; "my papa used to call me so;" and she would retreat in disgust to her nurse.

The "Bermuda" was within three days' sail of Liverpool. At that point they were to change steamers for America.

Alga, the Indian nurse, had, for some time, been confined to her state-room, and now she was dying. Ida had seen her ill before, and felt no particular apprehension. She sat by her side curled up in a corner, and held one of the skinny hands, occasionally laying her cheek upon it. The woman uttered a groan; her glittering eyes were fastened upon the eyes of the child.

"I was a woman of the Zeuanas," she said,

dreamily ; "but my widowhood came early. I chose servitude instead of the suttee. Yet, O Sheve, have I kept myself spotless."

"Why do you talk so, Alga? Is your head no better?"

"My head is better, precious one ; my heart is better. Take this ;" and with some difficulty she lifted a small gold chain from her neck, and put it over the head of the child.

"As you would have Sheve give you immortal honors," she continued, "cherish his image. Let no profane eyes look upon it, lest he strike you with disease. Worship him in the way I have told you, — secretly, fervently. They will try to turn you from your gods ; but as you hope to come where your old nurse is going, never heed them ; never listen to them."

The child's eyes opened wider.

"You said you would give me this when you died," she articulated, with shortened breath.

"No matter what I said ; what I say now is

the most important of all. You are going among the bitter enemies of your religion. They will try to turn your heart from Sheve."

"They never will; they never can. I hate them," said the child, vehemently.

"That is right; for they hate you and your gods. Let them see that they can have no power over you. Every day these hands have led you in secret to bow down before Sheve. He is powerful; he will avenge you of those who would draw your heart from him. Forget not Alga's teachings; forget not the dark faces you have loved. With her dying lips Alga entreats you, forget not the god of her fathers."

"Dying lips, Alga!" cried the child, horror-struck.

"Kiss me," was the quivering answer.

The child bent down and kissed her passionately.

"You will remember all I have said?"

"Everything. O Alga! you don't mean it; you can't leave me alone with all these frightful people."

"Sheve is calling; he will care for you."

A wild shriek was the only answer; then another and another. The passengers were awakened from their sleep, and hastened to the cabin. Ida stood there, her hands raised, her face quivering with anguish.

The glassy eyes of the nurse told of her bereavement. None of the women could approach the child; she waved them off with distracted cries, trembling from head to foot; then flung herself upon the dead body, from which none had the heart to release her.

The sailors, with that superstitious fear which is the result of long years of ignorance, clamored for instant burial; but the captain so far respected the child's grief as to delay preparations till the following day.

The wind was gusty and wet; sky and ocean

alike gray and gloomy. A fine mist filled all the atmosphere, and glittered on the far billows, like a veil; the great moving, yawning mass was full of caverns of blue sea-water.

The sailors sewed the body of the nurse in canvas, and whistled as they worked. A stranger, a pagan, a subordinate, they fancied they need show her but little respect.

The vessel slackened her speed at a word from the commander, and the passengers from cabin and steerage gathered together. A motley group they made: men of all nations, all costumes; some with fiery eyes and swart faces; women in whose faces one might look in vain for any trace of feminine softness.

Ida did not quite understand it. She kept back her cries of anguish, writhing with the effort. When they let the body go she seemed overpowered with astonishment, convulsed with rage. With a sudden movement she sprang from the captain's clasp, and threw herself over

the vessel's side. Fortunately her dress caught in some chains that were hanging over the lower deck, and, half dead, in a fainting state, she was rescued, and taken in charge by the passengers.





CHAPTER XV.

MARGARET'S SPECULATIONS.



WEEK had passed since Margaret had received news of her brother's death. They were preparing the house for Robert's return; but Margaret took up her duties joylessly. Only one sunbeam penetrated the clouds of her mental anguish: Ida, Charley's child, was coming. She had received another letter from John, who still insisted that she must come to him. Among other things he asked her:—

"Do you consider yourself a saint?"

"No," she exclaimed, bitterly; "religion has given me no compensation as yet. It makes

such men as Mr. Winthrop saints; it gives Sarah comfort; it makes even old Pomp wiser than many an enlightened scholar; but it does nothing for me. I wish John would not write me such letters. He has shaken my belief in good and holy things whenever I have listened to him. What is religion? Oh, if I only could be at peace!"

The Bible laid near her, and she usually read a chapter at this hour; but now it seemed as if some evil spirit possessed her. She marched straight by it, eyed it almost defiantly, as if the dear old book might feel the threat of her manner. And within its sacred lids, had she but known how to apply them, were words that would have healed every wound of her sick soul. As she had more than hinted, she had imbibed more of John's daring infidelity than she cared to acknowledge.

So true it is that "one sinner doeth much harm."

"Let God come to me, if there be a God. I did not take up life of my own accord, or wish to be; therefore I have a right to be saved, without any special effort on my part, — and I don't care anything about it."

That was what Margaret's soul was saying, as it struggled with unbelief, though the words, perhaps, never syllabled themselves on her lips.

She went downstairs with that comfortable feeling one has who has silenced an enemy, and found Sarah beating eggs in her easy low chair by the door-way.

"When do you expect 'em?" asked Sarah, as Margaret busied herself arranging her music in the wide oaken rack, with that preoccupied manner and fixed outlook of the eyes that denoted little interest in her passing occupation.

"On Monday."

"Sakes! so soon as that? Well, I s'pose we can be ready. I'd like to buy the farm cottage, wonder what Mr. Robert'll sell it for?"

"Buy the farm cottage, Sarah? Why, Mr. Winthrop lives there; it's the parsonage."

"What of that? Mr. Winthrop can move, — can't he? I want you to go there and take me with you; fact is, I'm too old to go in a new groove, and I can make butter and cheese; there's money in it, — money for you and I."

"Oh, no, Sarah. I've thought out about my future. We won't turn the minister out."

"Thought out your future? It must be a monstrous dark one. You don't speak as if you saw any pleasure in it."

"I don't have pleasure in anything now," was the cheerless response.

"That's because you're going through the furnace," said Sarah, grimly. "I s'pose if gold could *feel*, it would think what a mighty hard time it was having in the fire; but it comes out a great deal better than it went in. Why don't you go to the Lord, and —"

"Never mind, Sarah," said Margaret, impa-

tiently ; " as I told you, I've thought it all out. I'm going to live at the farm-house, though I little imagined," she added, with a half hysterical laugh, " that I was really preparing a home for myself, when I jested with Mrs. Rhoda. The good soul was perfectly delighted. She says I may have the whole house if I want it."

Sarah was silent ; then she got up, and went out of sight. Margaret sewed idly on, till presently it occurred to her that Sarah had left her abruptly. She put her work aside, and went into the kitchen.

Sarah stood with her arms folded, blinking her eyes persistently as she looked out of the window.

" Is there any fresh milk, Sarah?" asked Margaret.

" Plenty, Miss Margaret," Sarah replied, in a constrained voice.

" We shall have all we want at the farm, Sarah."

"*We?*" said the woman with emphasis.

"Of course, we; for you are included in the arrangement, if you will go. It would be hard to go without you, though I don't know as I ought to ask you to that lonesome place."

"I have such droves of company," said Sarah, with a grimace.

"You see I must have somebody to help me with that little child on my hands. It will be a burden, you know, as well as a pleasure. I am totally unused to children. She will be a loving little thing, though, I think, — Charley's child."

"Don't you go to making an idol of her before you see her," said Sarah, in her grim way.

"I must have something to love," cried Margaret, passionately.

"By and by you'll learn what that something is, I hope, Miss Margaret."

"With you to help me."

"Oh, I aint much account!"

"So much that I can't do without you, you

dear old Sarah; and I shan't take no for an answer. You must come with me."

Sarah turned round with glistening eyes.

"For a Christian woman," she said, resolutely, "I do think I'm the onreasonablest creeter that ever lived; and, if I *am* saved, it will be all of His mercy. Miss Margaret, it come nigh killing me to think you didn't need me. I thought you'd want a new hand; but the Lord be thanked that I'm going to be with you! I don't want wages; I only want to be with the child of my old mistress.

Margaret laughed nervously.

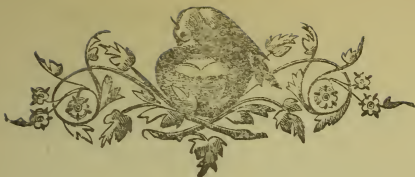
"Why, Sarah," she said, "you've made such a baby of me that I couldn't get along without you. You dear, good old Sarah, don't you know I love you? You have always been like a mother to me. My only marvel is what will Robert do; for he is as dependent on you as I am. I expect he'll send up to borrow you before he has been home a week."

"I won't leave," cried Sarah, with her old growl.

"Then we will get ready and go to-morrow," said Margaret; "and you shall make butter, if you like, or cheese, or anything else. And little Tommy can come up there and recite his lessons, and we'll give your sister all the little odd jobs to do. We will try and be happy together, you and I, Sarah, won't we?"

"We'll try, Miss Margaret; but, as I've often told you before, to get happiness you must go to the Fountain-head. It's as impossible to be happy without the Lord Jesus, as it is to make the grass and the flowers grow without sunshine. I shouldn't be doin' my duty if I didn't tell you that."





CHAPTER XVI.

SOME GOOD DONE.

MR. WINTHROP began to see the fruits of his labors. There was a steady growth of grace in the church. The blacksmith's wife was seen regularly in her seat on Sunday, listening with great seeming attention.

The wife of Doctor Ogilvie had sent for the minister, and confided to him that she had strong doubts whether she was living as she should be, and asked him if he thought she ought to discontinue her weekly whist-parties.

Of course he gave her sound advice, and

when she acknowledged that she was obliged to study the will of her husband, who was a worldly man, the poor lady wept plentifully. She had evidently read and thought much since his visit, and was in a very hopeful way.

"We go everywhere," she said, tearfully; "we have money enough, and plenty of leisure, — at least I have. But theatres and parties do not satisfy me. I am less happy when I come from them than I wish to be. There is something wanting; and if I could only find out how to please the doctor, and get religion too, I'm sure I would try."

The minister quoted some appropriate texts, spread all the details of her duty before her, and left her much comforted and more decided.

Even the lambs of the flock were asking their way to the green pastures, and inquiring for the Good Shepherd.

Mr. Winthrop talked it over with his sister,

seated upon the porch of the parsonage. Birdie listened with pleasure. Her thoughts, her plans, her very life, were identified with her brother's welfare. She only regarded herself as an appendage to him; and was too happy if he called upon her to perform any extra service.

He loved and sheltered her, and rested in her pleasant smile and pretty ways. He needed her. She knew it, and feasted on the thought.

As she sat at his feet, a ray of the fading sunshine illumined her upturned face. Reuben thought he had never seen a more angelic countenance.

"Have you met Miss Margaret lately?" she inquired.

"No, dear, only at church. Why do you ask?"

"She looks so sad. I thought perhaps she needed comfort."

"She has lost her brother, you know."

"Yes, I know," murmured Birdie, softly ; and glanced up wistfully in his face, then snuggled nearer. The look and the gesture told all she was thinking.

"Don't you ever go unless you are sent for?" queried Birdie, after a long pause.

"My dear, I did go once, but Miss Margaret refused to see me."

"She was in such deep trouble, I suppose."

"And Miss Margaret is a haughty woman," were his next words.

"I can't let you say that, Ruby, dear. I don't think she is haughty at all, only very quiet and sorrowful. She's as gentle and sweet as she can be ; but all her plans are broken up. O Ruby ! you are her pastor ; she needs you now."

"Needs *me*," he murmured, in his soft, loving voice ; "my dear, she needs HIM whom I serve."

"Then tell her so."

"I did once."

"And she listened?"

"She told me to wait till a more convenient season."

"Even if she did she might have felt deeply; how can you tell? You do her injustice; you do me injustice who believe in her."

Her voice faltered.

"Do you really think so much of her, little sister?" he asked, tenderly.

"Do I? A glimpse of her beautiful face comforts me. I only see two people when I go to church, — her and you."

Reuben was silent for a long while after this. Then, as they rose, brother and sister, to go in out of the damp evening air, he said, quietly, "I think you are right, little sister. I will call at the Ransoms to-morrow. Mr. Ransom brought home his wife to-day."

"And that reminds me," said Birdie, seating herself at the piano, preparatory to begin-

ing their evening worship, "a load of furniture went up to the farm-house to-day, and a piano with it. What do you suppose that means?"

"I don't know, my dear," answered Reuben.

Then they sang together one of the sweetest sacred songs that Christians ever join in : —

"When all thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view I'm lost,
In wonder, love, and praise."





CHAPTER XVII.

A NEW EXPERIENCE.

THE minister made good his word on the following day. He called at the Ransoms, and, to his surprise, not Sarah, but a smart, showily-dressed servant opened the door.

This was so different from the staid countenance he was accustomed to, that he stood for a second quite dumb.

When he did speak the smart servant understood that he wanted to see Mrs. Ransom, and ushered him into the most formal room in the house,—the parlor.

After a long period of waiting, at which he

inwardly protested, a bright face, with the hair a little in disorder, entered the room, as if hesitating between the doubts whether he was a pedlar or a clergyman.

"This is Mrs. Ransom," said the minister, rising. "I am happy to welcome you among us, madam, but my call this morning was intended for Miss Ransom."

"Oh!" and the quick-drawn breath proved that the worldly woman was somewhat relieved. "I am sorry Miss Margaret is not with us now. She left yesterday."

"Left!" there was surprise in his voice.

"Yes; left us for good. My husband insisted that she should stay here; but she had made all her arrangements, it seems, during our absence, and she is very set in her way. We could not prevail upon her to remain."

Reuben read the quick flash in her eye, which said plainer than words, "And I am glad of it"

"Then Miss Margaret has probably gone to

the city," he said, a strange sense of loss apparent in his voice; "I hoped to have seen her."

"Oh, dear, no, sir; I should have thought she would. She has a sister living in beautiful style, who would have been glad enough to have her; but she has queer notions of independence, and so she has gone up to the old farm. It belongs to Robert and her; but I should think she would die in such an out-of-the-way place."

"Ah, at the farm," said Reuben, quietly; "then I shall have her for a neighbor. I shall be very glad for my sister's sake."

Mrs. Ransom tried her very best to make herself agreeable, and the minister listened, and strove to feel interested.

"Talk religion to this woman!—could he? There she sat, with her well-bred simper, her rumpled curls, the cord and tassels of her magnificent dressing-gown loosely swaying to and fro in her idle fingers, a look of vacuity on her

face, and in her eyes, except when she was speaking.

"I am very glad you have settled in Salem, Mr. Winthrop," she said, with her sweetest smile. "When we were here last year, we had no clergyman, and we never knew what to depend upon. Oh, but we had some delightful students occasionally; but it was only now and then."

Mr. Winthrop sprang up. Why should he waste his pearls? Adieus were given.

"A dreadful bore!" yawned young Mrs. Ransom, when she re-entered the sitting-room. "Next time he comes, Nelly, unless Robert is in, just say that I am not at home. It is so very hard to entertain such people."

At night, when the minister returned to the parsonage, he found Birdie beaming like a seraph.

"O Ruby! she is here, — Miss Margaret, — over at the farm; did you know it?"

"Who told you?"

"Mrs. Rhoda came down with the milk; and I caught a glimpse of her to day in the garden. O Ruby! it made my heart ache to see her all in black. I wish people wouldn't wear black. I hate it."

"Why, Birdie, I didn't know as you could hate anything," said Reuben.

"Why don't people wear white when their friends die? I would, if I thought they were happier. We never wore black for mother."

"No, dear, because she did not wish us to."

"Now I am sure you know all about it," cried Birdie. "You have been to call upon her."

"Why, my dear, I should think some great thing had happened. Yes, I called at Mr. Robert Ransom's and heard the news. I am very glad for you, dear, you will have such a nice neighbor. I expect you will be running across every few moments, with some important matters to talk about."

"Then you are really glad?"

"Of course I am."

In the mean time Margaret had almost forgotten her little friend, Birdie ; so absorbed was she in preparing her new home for permanent occupation. She had chosen her own old room, the parlors, and a pretty apartment over the hall, which she intended to fit up for Ida. Mrs. Rhoda was ready with suggestions. Sarah was a host in herself. Delightedly she explored the beloved places where she had passed so many happy hours.

"I think I can be a better Christian on a farm," she said ; "there's so much to take up the attention, that your miserable self lets you alone. Here was where I first thought of seeking the Saviour. It was hearing your blessed mother pray that started me. Night after night when she was sick, she would pray for all of us, and my name was always mentioned. That set me to thinking, and then I went to the Lord and prayed for myself. So you're going to

have the same old room, Miss Margaret ; there isn't a pleasanter in all the house. And you can see the minister's little place, too. We'll throw the parlors open for a thorough airing ; they're musty. Ah ! how often I've seen your mother flitting about ! she was the particularist soul ! Nobody must see to this place but herself. I believe if she knew it, Miss Margaret, she'd just enjoy thinking you were back in the old place."

"Perhaps she does know," said Margaret.

"Folks' new-fangled notions would make us think so," said Sarah ; "but as for me, if I ever git to the blessed land, I'll stay there."

The place was so cheerful, so like her girlhood's old home, that Margaret felt in a measure happy. Her life was broken, she said in a misanthropic way, — she had laid her plans again and again, and failed. What remained but the expectation of failure ? She merely waited now for what fate, as she called it, had in store for her.

"Mr. Robert's come," said Sarah, in an undertone. "I knew he'd be right up here. Can't get along without you, after all, I'll bet ;" and like a grim familiar she disappeared, as Robert's step was heard in the hall. Margaret ran out to meet him.

"My darling, how blooming you look!" he cried, almost taking her in his arms. "I was anxious about you. How home-like and natural everything looks! I shall run up here often now, and bring Lettie sometimes." He stretched himself upon the deep lounge, declaring that it seemed like old times come back.

"It seems a completion of my plans to have *you* here," said Margaret.

"And an aggravation that I've got to leave you, eh! I miss you every moment, dear old Maggie!"

The pet name, — it sent tears rushing to her eyes. When he was fondest he called her old.

"Are you happy here, dear?" he asked, a moment after.

"Yes, Robert; as happy as I ever expect to be."

"You were always a bit of a misanthrope, Margaret. Well, perhaps you are right; we never get all we ask for, and maybe it is best we shouldn't. I often wish we had the old faith that made our parents so happy," he added.

Margaret did not answer him. She felt rebellious just then.

"When do you expect that little Indian?" he asked, after a pause.

"By the first of next month."

"Then I'll tell you what to do. Eleanor has been teasing me to bring you to the city for the last six months. I'll take you down, and you can meet the poor little thing. It would be barbarous to have her sent out here like an express parcel."

"So it would," said Margaret.

"Then say you'll go. I need a change; and must buy some new goods."

"Will Lettie go?"

"No; it's not the season. She is preparing for that. I can stay a week."

One whole week to have Robert to herself, as in the blessed old times. She scolded her heart for being so selfish; nevertheless she assented.

"I'll go, Robert."

"Good for you! We'll surprise Eleanor."

"She don't need us though," said Margaret, the old gloom oppressing her. "She is so thoroughly contented, so happy with her little one!"

"But perhaps we need her. It will make us both happier to feel and see the beauty that surrounds her home atmosphere. I've come to spend the evening. Hallo! there's Winthrop's voice. I must ask him in."

He sprang to the door, and presently the minister entered with Birdie on his arm. Margaret settled the little creature in a low rocking-chair, and spoke of a light.

"There's light enough, dear," said Robert; "don't spoil the effect."

There was light enough to see Margaret's black-draped figure rocking softly back and forth; Birdie, with expectant little face, at her side; the minister's grave but pleasant countenance; and Robert smiling and flushed a little.

The conversation led from ordinary to more sacred things. Robert spoke of his mother, -- of his ancestry.

"You ought to be a good man," said the minister, earnestly.

"I ought to be, I know," said Robert; "and I believe I try to be. But there are so many isms afloat nowadays, that they unsettle a man's faith."

"Christ is the only way," was the reply; "there is no ism there and nothing new. There is no other name under heaven by which we shall be saved."

"Those are strong words," said Robert.

"And true ones. The Bible is explicit on that point; the words of Jesus are conclusive. He tells us, if any man try to climb any other way into the kingdom than through him, that man is a thief and a robber. We are told there are many roads. In a general way, this is true. But to reach the divine kingdom of Jesus, there is, there can be, but *one* way — and that way is Christ. No mere man would dare to say, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life!"

"How are we to come to him?" asked Robert, while the hot tears were gathering in Margaret's eyes. It would be so sweet, she thought, to find rest and peace; to be troubled no more with tormenting suggestions and sus-

picious. Oh, it would be so sweet! And she listened eagerly for the forthcoming words.

"How do you get any good thing you wish for?"

"Seek for it," said Robert, promptly; "work for it sometimes."

"Or ask for it," said Birdie, timidly.

"I think Birdie has given the answer," said her brother, smiling. "Our Lord says, 'Ask and it shall be given unto you.'"

"Sometimes I have doubted if there be such a thing as religion," said Robert, bluntly.

"You have doubted the reality of the faith that made your mother's such a grand Christian character," said Mr. Winthrop.

"No, no; I can't say that," said Robert, quickly. "I shall never forget her dying; something beyond this world sustained her; of that I am sure. I only wish I had it."

"Ask for it," said the minister, "earnestly, believingly, on the knees of your heart. I tell

you there is a reality in the religion of Jesus Christ. Strange that men will go anywhere, do anything, hear any doctrine, rather than simply submit themselves to the sweet rule of Christ. Oh, how wonderful the dear Saviour's words over Jerusalem, — '*I would, but ye would not*'! What yearning, what pity, what tenderness!"

There was a long silence. The lustre of the broad moon deepened in brilliancy. Margaret was gazing at her brother almost as if all hope of her salvation laid in his decision.

"We can't be children again," at last he said. "I sometimes wish we could, and have others do our thinking."

"We can't be children, truly," said Mr. Winthrop, rising to go; "but we can cultivate the spirit of the trusting child, and, coming to Christ, say, '*Our Father*.'"

"I am sure I thank you," said Robert, heartily. "You have given me something to think of. I assure you I shan't forget."

Margaret walked the length of the lane with Robert, silently. From the gate they could see the white stones in the little graveyard.

"If only Charley laid there!" half sobbed Margaret.





CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE CITY.



LEANOR was not looking for her sister when she came, and was betrayed into laughing and crying at the same time.

"Your room is ready," she said, kissing Margaret again and again. "How do you keep yourself so pretty? It must be the Salem air."

This was while they went over the broad staircase, arm in arm. They talked softly and tearfully of Charley; and Margaret had brought some of his letters.

"And Robert, is he happy?" asked Eleanor, in a low voice.

"I hope so."

"Oh, but I dread the coming winter! *She*, Lettie, told me she intended to come into the city, have a box at the theatre, and go into all sorts of gayeties. And she'll do it, or there'll be no peace for Robert."

At that moment the nurse entered with a veritable cherub in her arms.

"Oh, he is too beautiful, almost, for flesh and blood!" cried Margaret.

"Isn't he lovely? We almost worship him. His father never leaves the house after business hours, but just devotes himself to him. This is your Aunt Margaret, precious; give her your hand, my darling."

The darling obediently stretched out a beautiful little hand, ivory for whiteness. Margaret covered it with kisses.

"I, too, shall have something to love," she said, softly, "when I have Charley's child;" and the thought made her eyes shine.

"There's my husband; excuse me a moment, Margaret," and Eleanor tripped out of the room.

Margaret sat there by herself, looking round the well appointed apartment.

"I don't believe Eleanor is any more of a Christian than I am," she murmured; "but life goes smoothly enough with her. If we must have humiliation and crosses and sorrow, till we become what we ought to be, why don't she? A loving husband, a beautiful babe, a house full of luxury, things agreeable on every hand, she enjoys life to the utmost, while everything fails me. No, not everything, — if God only please, —" she thought, with quick heart-throbs; "my beautiful little name-child is coming, — an angel to lighten my darkness. How sweet and tender and confiding I will teach her to be!"

Looking over a book of photographs, that evening, Margaret said: —

"Ida will look like this. I feel assured she

will." She showed the pictured face to Robert.

"Don't let your imagination run away with you, dear," he said, gravely; "she may just possibly be an ugly little monkey."

"For shame, Robert!" cried Eleanor, from the other side of the room.

"I believe she will look like this," persisted Margaret. "I see Charley's face in the picture."

"That," said Eleanor, leaving her music, "why, it's a poor little beggar somebody picked up, and a friend of mine adopted. She's beautiful though, and I don't doubt little Ida will be just as pretty. But then you must allow for her habits and her training, you know."

"Oh, I shall allow for everything," said Margaret.

"I wonder Charley didn't send her on years ago," said Eleanor's husband.

"She was his all, dear," said his wife; "how

could he part with her? Fancy you sending off your boy, Mr. Philosopher."

"Sure enough," he said, and subsided into his newspaper.

"When will she be here?" asked Eleanor.

"In three or four days, Robert thinks," Margaret said.

"And what is the ship?"

"'Albion,' Liverpool line," Robert replied. "She is due next week —and a splendid ship. We must go on board, all of us, when she gets in."





CHAPTER XIX.

NEWS FROM THE "ALBION."

SO much had Margaret accustomed herself to depend upon earthly supports, that she grew quite happy as the time went on, and brought her brother's child nearer, day by day.

That the little girl might have sickened and died,—that the ocean had proved faithless,—she could not believe. She never looked at notices of disasters at sea; she sought after the sweet face in the photograph album.

"In this," she said to herself, day and night, "God will be good to me, I know he will. He will give me the child's heart. She is beautiful,

or, if not beautiful, interesting and affectionate, and she will love me for her father's sake. How she will brighten up the old homestead with her winsome ways! and I must be careful lest Sarah or Rhoda spoil her. What more shall I need to make me quite content?"

It was the old, visionary idol-making; for not those only who pray to stocks and stones are idolaters. Thousands are in our very midst, worshipping the gods of their own devising, and to them apply these words of Holy Writ: "Little children, *keep yourselves* from idols."

Margaret thought perpetually upon this theme; how she should cultivate this new, strange, nature, and be repaid by the child's devotion.

"We will take such beautiful walks together," she said, "and I will teach her the names of all our American trees and flowers, and she shall tell me of the Indian world, where Charley lived so long.

"By degrees, the ripe, sweet air will be

touched with frost, and she will see on branch and window-frame, a daily miracle."

If there ever came across the serenity of her anticipations a foreboding that all might not be well, her heart sank like lead.

"You don't hear from the vessel," she said to Robert, one day.

"No; it's overdue too."

"Surely there couldn't be a wreck in this weather!" she cried.

"There have been one or two heavy gales at sea; but the owners feel no alarm as yet."

"As yet!" Margaret's soul was in arms.

"Don't set your heart too much on this thing, Margaret," said Robert. "It is your way, you know. The child may not have stood the voyage."

"O Robert, you are cruel."

"Because it troubles me to see your anxiety. You are looking haggard and troubled."

After that Margaret was despondent again.

She grew weary of even her sister's chats about "baby," and dissertations upon her own happiness. One day she burst out, impatiently : —

"But the evil days may come, when you shall say, I have no pleasure in them."

"Good gracious!" said Eleanor, "what raven-croak is that? How dare you give me such a shock, you bird of evil!" She laughed, but she was troubled.

"I only mean that one can't expect prosperity forever; yours has been a rarely even life. Do you never look for trouble?"

"Never; why should I? One insults Heaven by distrust."

"Then are you happy, — I mean, happy as Christians say they are? Have you entire confidence in God?"

"I try to have," said her sister, gravely, "though I often fail in gratitude, I know. I hope I am a Christian."

"What do you mean by a Christian?" asked Margaret.

"Feeling safe in the Father's care for time and for eternity. Trusting all to him. Feeling satisfied with his providences, — living out, daily, if it be possible, all the virtues of that grand life lived in the flesh by our Saviour."

"But he was more than man. How can we?"

"He suffered *as* man, — not as more than man," said Eleanor, quietly. "In his capacity for loving, forgiving, instructing, he did all as a man. How otherwise could he understand all our frailties? I tell you what, Margaret, I don't often talk of these things, but I think of them, and if I forget my duties, I am losing uncounted blessings. There is a treasure within our reach, brighter than any kingly crown, and we make no effort to obtain it. I get so swallowed up in earthly cares and earthly loves, that I am ashamed of myself for my poor attainments."

"I think, when *He* sees fit, *He* will change us," said Margaret.

"When *we* see fit, you mean," responded Eleanor. She rose at the cry of her babe, and went into the nursery.

"Sometimes I think," said Eleanor, hushing her boy, "suppose God should take our lovely babe! What should I do? He is bound to my heart with every fibre of my being. I hope it is not idolatry."

"The 'Albion' is spoken!" cried a manly voice, and Robert looked in the nursery. Margaret grew deathly pale; she trembled in every limb.

"She is fainting," cried Eleanor.

"I never fainted in my life," said Margaret, rousing herself; "but it was such a shock!"

"I guess I'll carry my good news to another market, next time," said Robert, with a grimace.

"When will she be in?" asked Eleanor.

"To-morrow, Providence permitting. They

have had a good deal of sickness on board," he added.

"O Robert -- and little Ida!"

"Don't worry beforehand, darling; I dare say she is all right."

Margaret hurried to her own room to think.

"What makes me feel so intensely?" she thought. "Eleanor is not so; she is always calm. I am always in a tempest of feeling."

A restless night succeeded.

As the clock struck twelve, finding it impossible to sleep, Margaret rose and sat down by the window. The moonbeams were gradually waning, but a weird light fell over the sleeping city. What histories were being transacted in the silence of that hour! Joy, despair, death, birth, — all were going on under the silent heavens.

Above, the stars looked solemnly down; they saw the "Albion," in which all Margaret's hopes were centred. She tried to picture what

Charley's child would be like, and evermore there was in her mind's eyes a beautiful vision of the unknown face.

Could she but look upon the water just now, as the moon did! She remembered that the harbor could be seen from the roof of the house. A wild longing to go up there took possession of her. Nothing was easier; she could light the gas in the upper hall, and lift the trap-door, which opened easily. It would be worth all the trouble, to see the broad expanse of sky, of water, the ships, and the calm night.

Throwing a shawl over her shoulders, she found her way upstairs, and presently out on the house-top, with all the glorious panorama of midnight spread out before her.

Inexpressibly soothed, she gazed over the wide horizon, where the shadows were as clear as if cut out of the darkness; where church-spires lifted their civilizing shafts, starred now as with diamonds, and the many masts clustered

together like a line of forest trees. This dreamy, nocturnal vision gave her a new sense of life and its responsibility. There were no lights visible, save that one hung up amidst the drapery of clouds. The waters seemed hushed and motionless, and a dark object, at the farthest point visible to the eye, she chose to fancy the "Albion," safe after its ocean voyage,—and bearing most precious freight to her expectant heart.

So peaceful was the scene that all Margaret's stormy doubts were stayed. In this grand breadth and silence, she seemed to hear the voice of Deity. For the first time she felt her own littleness, her selfishness, her great need.

"Oh, why can I not find Thee?" she cried, in a voice smothered by the intensity of her feelings, her arms uplifted, her face full of the unuttered yearning of her soul. "What is there stands like a hard, invisible presence between

me and God? Oh, wonderful world! and still more wonderful humanity! Why should I feel always, always, this craving and unrest? Even that awful ocean is still sometimes, and peace is written all over it; but I am never still. I try to forget that I have a soul, or any spiritual needs; but I can't, I can't. As God lives, so am I destined to live on and on forever. What shall I do? Which way shall I turn? How change this strange rebellious nature? O John! you taught me to doubt.

"How still, how peaceful! God's glory is in the night; for then he covers up the dark misdeeds of men. The day is for Satan, who glories in his shame." Then, lifting up her hands, she cried, tremblingly:—

"O Lord, give me this little child, and through her draw me to thyself."

A strange peace fell upon her spirit. Body and brain rested for a brief season.

"Perhaps God will hear my prayer," she murmured.

Quietly she went back to her room, threw herself on the bed, and slept till morning. Then, awakened by a knock, she received the following note : —

"Three cheers, Margaret! The 'Albion' is in. Husband went off by daylight. *The little child is there* — all right! The passengers will be landed at ten.

"ELEANOR."

"Dear, thoughtful Eleanor!" murmured Margaret. "Oh, how happy I am! To-night, — *to-night*, I shall have Charley's little girl in my arms. She will be all, all my own."

She threw herself upon her knees in an agony of gratitude; but she could not utter a word.

"Bravo!" cried Robert, when she came into the dining-room; "see how changed she is!"

Eleanor laughed heartily ; the little one crowed ; even the cat looked happy. Robert protested.

"I saw the 'Albion,' " said Eleanor's husband ; "and a noble craft she is. She gave me quite a longing for the sea. I saw the captain ; he was in a great hurry, but said the child was there. Her nurse, though, died on the voyage to Liverpool."

"I forgot there was a nurse," said Margaret.

"I'm afraid you're glad," said Robert. "You want her all to yourself, — the poor little Indian. I'm curious to see her."

"She was fast asleep in her state-room," said Hal, Eleanor's husband. "The captain said very little — so busy. What do you say to going on board with me, to fetch her off?"

Margaret was delighted.

"It does me good to see your eyes dance," said Robert ; "but you are eating nothing."

"I can't eat," she said.

"No breakfast, no boat-row," he laughed.

"Try, Margaret," said Eleanor.

And Margaret found that she could dispose of the bit of well-broiled steak on her plate, and a slice of toast. Her cheek was flushed; she trembled with excitement.





CHAPTER XX.

MARGARET'S GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT.

SO that is the 'Albion'? What a splendid ship!" said Margaret, as the swift, even strokes of the oarsmen brought them, moment by moment, nearer to the great shadow-framed hull.

"Yes, that is the famous 'Albion;' one of the finest ships in the Liverpool line. How exhilarating the atmosphere! I don't wonder sailors find it hard to breathe ashore. How it fills one's lungs!" and he drew a deep inspiration.

Margaret looked down into the yielding water; she let her hand drift atop for a moment, then drew it shudderingly back, as she

thought that was Charley's grave. All the past came surging up to her at that moment: her many disappointments, the delight with which she had anticipated her voyage to India, the reluctance with which she had decided not to go to Rome. All was over now, and she gave herself up to the luxury of thinking of Charley's child.

"India is coming to me," she whispered, under her breath; "it is all right."

Over the water were lovely glints and sparkles.

"I never saw so many dimples; never knew there was such beauty in the sea," she said. Here and there a snowy sail floated across their course, and the oarsmen slacked in their exertions, while the boat danced in the wake of the flying vessel. Hither and thither, painted steamers, with their gay freights, moved with a quick, stately motion.

"It wakes one up to sail here," said Hal; "the harbor is always alive. There are no

shops to shut these busy men in ; their lives are spent in the open air. Here we are alongside ; the tug will take the passengers off. They are busy with the baggage."

Margaret's brain felt in a whirl. In vain she tried to conquer her nervousness ; she felt like laughing and crying in the same breath.

Groups of people were about her, all intent upon their own welfare. Friends congratulated each other ; some were weeping for joy. Amidst trunks, bandboxes, packages, and eager throngs who did not care whether they were in the way or not, Margaret followed her brother, until they gained the handsome saloon, where she gratefully found a place to sit down, utterly wearied with the bustle and laughter and jargon of the crowd.

Some time elapsed before they could make inquiries of the captain.

A beautiful golden-haired little child set all

Margaret's pulses to leaping, as she came shyly up to her.

"Is this Ida?" she cried, lovingly.

The child shook her head.

"I'm Netty," she said, with a smile that brought her a kiss.

"Are there any other little girls aboard?"

"Not any very 'ittle girls," was the reply.

"Is your 'ittle girl dead?"

"No, dear; why do you ask?"

"'Cause when my baby-sister died, mamma wore black things," was the reply.

"Isn't there a little girl by the name of Ida on board? You must have played with her sometimes."

"Only a sick 'ittle girl — oh, so sick!"

"That's my poor child," thought Margaret.

"And where is she?"

At that moment the stewardess made her appearance, in a smart cap with pink bows and ribbons.

"You are looking for the little girl from India, the gentleman tells me," she said.

"Yes." Margaret rose in a flutter.

"I couldn't get her to come here. Will you go down into the state-room? I didn't think the child would live to get here; but she is gaining strength now. She mourns a great deal."

"For her father?" interrogated Margaret.

"For her nurse, it seems to be. The poor thing tried to throw herself overboard when they buried the woman at sea, and they had all they could do to save her."

Margaret was unconscious of the strong grasp she gave the arm of the stewardess, as she leaned on her, going down the stairs.

"Have you had the sole care of her?" asked Margaret.

"Yes, miss; I've done everything I could, or she would let me. But she's a very singular child."

"Poor little thing!" mused Margaret; "she needs love;" but she felt a strange dread as she drew near the room. Her visions, however, were not as rose-colored as they had been.

"Upon my word, she has locked herself in," said the stewardess, almost angrily. "Little miss!" she called, in as pleasant a voice as she could assume; "unfasten the door instantly! Your friend has come to take you."

"Say her Aunt Margaret."

The stewardess complied; but there was no answer.

"Don't be frightened, miss; she is always up to such tricks. If I might say so, I think she is very obstinate for a child of her age." She rattled the door; presently the key was turned and the two women entered.

Margaret was not prepared for the sight that met her vision.

Crouched in one corner sat a child, with an

unchildish face, thin, and, just then, expressionless almost to vacuity, seeming to be in an angry or a sullen mood. Her large, gray, fierce-looking eyes shone with unnatural brightness; her head was shorn of its hair, and gave her an extremely repulsive appearance.

"Charley's child!" gasped Margaret; and caught at the side of the berth to keep herself from falling. She thought of her brother Robert's word's: "An ugly little monkey." How hideously they stood out in her brain! She thought of her soul's cry the night before, and shuddered and shivered as if with an ague-fit. But she conquered her nervousness, and went towards the child with the words:—

"My dear, I am your Aunt Margaret."

The child frowned at her, but spoke not a word.

"Did not your papa tell you about me? Didn't you know you were named after me?"

"I don't want you;" and that was all she got

for her trouble. The words did not seem uttered so much in defiance as in sadness.

"Another blow!" murmured Margaret. "No beauty, no sweetness, no tenderness, no childish grace. I am utterly discouraged."

"Miss, this is your aunt, and you must go with her," said the stewardess, sternly. "There's no use in being tender of her," she continued, turning to Margaret. "I've never lifted my finger to her, — though I can't say I haven't longed to when she got in her sullen fits. We English don't believe in sparing the rod, and spoiling the child."

Margaret turned again to the child her tenderness had failed to move. She had not changed her position; the thin fingers were locked over her breast, and there seemed either a menace or strong fear in their tension.

"Come, dear," said Margaret, making one more effort, "you must go with me to my home. I love you, and I want you to love me, for

your father's sake. Won't you kiss me, and be good friends with me?"

The child lowered her brows into an ominous frown. She was too weak for dignity, too proud for tears. She made a gesture with her mite of a hand, that repulsed Margaret more than bitterest words would have done, and she drew back, with hot tears forcing themselves to her eyes, and a great lump in her throat.

"It's of no use," she said, hurriedly; "love will not change her. And I have longed so for this day!"

"Miss Ida, come and be dressed, instantly, or" — and she gave a threatening glance — "you know what I *will* do."

A look of blended fear and hate came into the child's face. Her fingers relaxed their hold. She lifted herself with an effort, and came slowly forward.

"Dress me," she said, and seemed to swallow some fierce, rebellious passion as she spoke,

standing there quite passive. Margaret looked on in astonishment.

"It's something she wears, miss, night and day," said the nurse, aside; "when everything else fails, I threaten her with what you heard. Her garb aint none of the most fashionable," she continued, as she inducted the child into a sort of tunic, and placed a crumpled black hat on her head; "but you'll soon fix her up. Poor dear, she's an orphan, and that's enough to make one tender of her."

A great pity swelled Margaret's heart, as she looked at the forlorn little creature, so staid in her manner, so old, so seemingly deserted.

"Come, dear," she said, holding out her hand; but the child deliberately put her own hands behind her.

"Follow the lady then," said the stewardess. "It's one of her peculiarities, miss, that she never will touch anybody, if she can help it; so it needn't make you feel bad."

They ascended to freer light and air, and met Harry and the captain.

"O Hal!" exclaimed Margaret, and by the greatest effort suppressed a sob. I am sorry to say that the ludicrous element in the tableau that presented itself to the young man's vision got the better of his judgment. He turned his head, with sudden laughter.





CHAPTER XXI.

MARGARET REBELLIOUS.



COULDN'T help it, Nelly, upon my honor," Harry said afterwards, to his wife. "Robert's words came back to me so forcibly; and there stood a brown, sulky little thing, without any hair, and with the most ravenous-looking pair of gray eyes I ever saw in all my life, and at the same time, a regal, don't-you-touch-me look, that was enough to upset the gravity of an owl."

"Poor Margaret!" sighed his wife, softly. "All her promised blessings seem to turn to ashes!"

"I know it was a regular mean thing to do;

and the poor girl looked ready to cry, too ; but it did her good, for all that, — made her a little angry ; and I only wished she had boxed my ears," he added, laughing again at the recollection. "I made for a carriage as soon as I reached the wharf ; didn't want people to think I was escorting a Feejee Islander."

"Hal, remember it is Charley's child," said Eleanor, sadly.

"Well, it may be ; but I confess to a suspicion that it's some little Indian put in her stead," he replied.

"Poor Margaret !" sighed Eleanor again ; "her idols are clay, after all. She looked for a lovely and loving companion ; and instead of that she will have her hands full with a sullen, uninteresting girl, — a perfect little savage. It don't seem to me that the child has any feeling whatever."

"Where is the little fright ?" queried Harry.

"Upstairs with Margaret, who has begun straightway to remodel her dresses."

Presently Eleanor took her beautiful boy up to Margaret's room. Ida had been put into a white apron, that quite swallowed up her emaciated figure.

Nothing could be done to hide the hideous baldness of her head, and in her weakness and sullenness she looked particularly unamiable. Yet her features were good, her mouth small and sensitive, her eyes well-shaped, though sunken.

It was the expression of long weariness, discontent, and mourning that gave the face its repulsive character. "If she would only smile sometimes; only change from that unnatural rigidity of expression!" Eleanor said, regarding the child, who sat by the window, her folded hands lying listlessly on her lap.

"The white people are all deceivers," Ida's nurse had said again and again. "They will

tell you they love you, so as to change your heart from your gods ; but believe Alga, believe Sheve, who says they are liars, and haters of our people. Trust them not, and above all never let them see or know what you worship, or they will kill you with many dreadful tortures."

What wonder that the child's soul stood on the threshold of anger and hate?

"She is Charley's child," said Margaret, with a strong inflection of the voice. "Whether she is beautiful, or loving, or tender, or not, she is my charge, and I accept it. I shall learn by and by to take my blessings with decent humility," she added, with a bitter accent.

"O Margaret! that don't sound like you; not a bit. It was as if you said curses, instead of blessings. Don't, dear; you find fault with God. You know that many of our greatest blessings come to us in disguise."

"I am doubly fortunate then," said Margaret,

in the same cold tone of irony ; "all of mine seem to be disguised. Eleanor, I just wish I had been born in some poor, homely sphere,— the daughter of a washerwoman, without desires for better things, without love for the beautiful. I am sure it would have been better for me."

"Don't talk so, Margaret," said Eleanor, the tears in her eyes. "You, with so many blessings surrounding you, to dare to say that !"

"The worse people talk and do, sometimes, the better they fare."

"I must take my boy away," said Eleanor, a little hysterically, in her effort to laugh ; "his aunt's heretical notions are making him uneasy."

"Don't go, Eleanor," said Margaret, with a penitential look. "I know I am wicked ; but you must make some allowances,—I am so bitterly disappointed. Forgive me, dear, if I have hurt your feelings. You know I am going home to-morrow. The sooner I get into the

backwoods the better ;” and she laughed nervously.

“Have you said anything to her?”

“One might as well talk with a stone. I’ve exhausted my voice and my temper almost. I had no idea I could feel so ugly. Now I intend to let her severely alone.”

“Don’t she even answer you?”

“Not a word, except with a refined ingenuity in that hideous Hindostanee.”

Eleanor seemed amused at that.

“The creature must be witty, after all,” she said ; “depend upon it she is no ordinary child.”

“That’s just what I think,” said Margaret, dryly. “I wish she was.”

Eleanor moved towards the window. The child looked at her with a glance of distrust.

“See, I have brought this dear little baby,”

Eleanor said, the mother-love shining in her beautiful eyes.

"I don't like children," was the answer; and Ida drew back, turning again to the street.

"But you can't help liking this one. See what lovely rosy cheeks he has, and what golden curls!"

"No; I frighten him," was the quick answer; and the child turned resolutely away again, so self-contained, so reticent, that her eyes seemed gazing on things nobody else could see.

"Pleasant, isn't it?" queried Margaret, as Eleanor came back to her side.

"It is certainly a curious study of human nature. I think I should rather like it," said her sister.

"I found her under the bed this morning."

"What! did she fall out?"

"Oh, no; she took a pillow with her."

"Why, do you suppose?"

"To avoid sleeping with me. I kissed her

last night. She instantly clapped her hands over her face, and buried both in the bed-clothes, trembling convulsively. I shan't kiss her again in a hurry."

"What can have made her so peculiar? She is the strangest study I ever met with."





CHAPTER XXII.

SARAH'S DECISION.

SHARLEY always wrote that she was a singular child, — a child of strange tenacities, I remember he often said," replied Margaret. "He must have left her a great part of the time with her nurses, and possibly he had not the faculty of winning her heart, being so immersed in business. I fear, however, that her long sickness has affected her brain."

"She must have watched last night till you were sound asleep."

"I have no doubt of it. To-night I shall

make her a bed on the lounge ; but — " Margaret's sensitive lips quivered.

"Dear Margaret," said Eleanor, stooping and kissing her, "I know your disappointment is a terrible one — but never mind. How can you tell but she may be everything to you yet?"

"I must learn to take things as they come," said Margaret, heroically ; but deep in her heart the wound rankled.

Could she have made the slightest impression, roused the child's anger even ; but no, there was only that strange, chilling indifference. It was not possible to be tender with her, — not for Margaret, who loved beauty and grace above all things, and who did not know the sacred pleasure of doing for the love of Christ.

Her heart had been thwarted, she said, in all its expectations, but this latest trial was the sorest. She busied herself altering over old dresses, and making new ones. The child sub-

mitted passively to be measured. Margaret groaned as she looked at her.

"She will *never* smile," she said; "her heart is stone, her face is fixed. She is a natural misanthrope. What an awful destiny!"

Robert was glad to go home. "Salem air was his wine," he said, and, besides, everybody missed Margaret. He, too, had been shocked with the child's appearance, for he had been away for a few days, in another city, buying goods.

When he first met her she had on a queer little cap, which Margaret had made to hide the bare head, but it by no means improved her countenance.

"You'll shake hands with your uncle, little one, won't you?" he said, in shocked tones, that were intended to be affectionate.

"I had rather not, thank you, sir," was the frigid reply.

"Well, she is a cool one," he muttered, below

his breath ; "for her age, remarkable in the matter of etiquette."

Margaret took leave of Eleanor and her little family with an ache at her heart.

"I shall be so glad to get home," she said, nestling up to Robert, after they had made the child comfortable on a seat by herself.

"Yes, Salem *is* home," he answered, quietly. "I feel as if I'm all right now ; everything is right," he added, "if we only think so."

"No," Margaret protested, promptly.

"Well, any way, we don't have the ordering of things."

"If we did, shouldn't we better them, sometimes? I know I should ;" with a dash of fierceness in her voice.

"What would you change?"

"Oh, a great many things. That child's dreadful nature, for one. Why, Robert, I am not only learning not to like her, but, sometimes, I almost think I —"

"There, never mind, never mind, Maggie Always keep your heart sweet with the thought that she is Charley's child. There must be some good in her ; it will come out some time ; don't get discouraged."

"O Robert, I *am* discouraged," she said, bitterly, feeling like laying her head on his shoulder, and crying like a child ; "everything fails me."

"There's one thing won't fail you, Maggie, — wouldn't fail either of us, if we had it. I'm beginning to think a good deal of what I have heard from the pulpit of late. That man preaches right at my heart, and I only wish I could get a glimpse of the wonderful light he tells us of. All things, the Bible says, work together for good to those who love *Him* That you see, must be the condition, — love to God — I'm sure it is not in my selfish heart, and whatever trials I may have to bear, — and some I do have, — I find I take them in such a spirit, that

they become anything but blessings. Maggie, dear, you and I are both out in the dark, I fear."

Maggie answered nothing. She had been thinking much about these things herself lately, but she could not bring herself to feel that God was kind to her; and if he was smiting her, "why," cried her rebellious heart, "I won't be driven!"

"Are you all right, little one?" asked Robert, pleasantly, seeing the great gray eyes watching him.

"Yes, thank you, sir," she said, passively, and turned away as if to avoid further questioning.

"Sarah has finished the bedroom," said Robert, addressing Margaret. "But, excuse me, it seems like putting a young bear into a silver cage; she won't appreciate it. There," seeing sudden tears, "now my rough tongue has hurt you."

"Nothing hurts me now," said Margaret.

Robert's carriage was in waiting for them at the depot. Lettie was there, in her father's buggy, half wild to get a look at the little Indian. At sight of her, peering this side and that, Margaret's cheek flushed. It was a good sign that she was ready to do battle for the child.

"My gracious!" cried Robert's volatile wife, with a look of consternation, as Robert held Ida up to step in the carriage. And then as Robert came round, "Why, she's a perfect fright! Oh, the ugly, horrible, little thing!"

"Don't, dear," said Robert; but Lettie had whipped the horses round.

"I say, Margaret," she cried, almost coarsely, "what are you going to charge a sight? and then shrank back, for Ida, her eyes blazing, sprang up and cried out in Hindostanee, gesticulating with fiery vehemence, — calling down the anger of her gods, no doubt, on this frivo-

lous creature who could make sport of her misfortune.

Margaret attempted to put an arm about her, and the movement restored the child to her normal condition. She sank down, suppressing her rage, but her eyes glittered and her chest heaved.

Margaret dreaded to meet Sarah, Mrs. Rhoda, everybody. She was beginning to feel a strange, subtle dread in the presence of the child, herself.

Sarah, who had the instincts of a lady, quietly greeted her mistress, and carried the child, who had fallen asleep, upstairs in her arms.

"She's not a beauty, is she, Sarah?" queried Margaret, avoiding her eye.

"She's a little child," said Sarah, tenderly, "and that's enough for me;" whereupon Margaret went up and kissed her on the cheek.

Every time Margaret woke up that night,

she seemed to hear the voice of an angel, saying : —

"She's a little child, and that's enough for me."

She found herself repeating it in the morning, and went with less dread into Ida's room.

The child sat bolt upright in bed ; there was a little color in her sallow cheeks ; even this gave heart to Margaret.

"You are home now," she said, softly ; "and this is your own little room. Don't you like it?"

"I don't think it is nice at all," was the deliberate reply. Margaret called up all her philosophy.

"Why don't you like it, dear?" she asked.

"It is pink," was the reply ; "I never liked pink."

"And is that all?"

"It is very small," was the next assurance.

"My room was as large as papa's. This is like the steamer."

"Then you shall have the largest room in the house. Shall you like that?"

"I shan't like here at all," was the prompt reply. And Margaret had to repeat again and again, "She is Charley's child," to keep her temper.

After she was dressed Ida hung about, here and there, preoccupied, her face filled with the care of a woman's life almost. Even Mrs. Rhoda, who loved children, did not make any advances to her, and said, confidentially to Sarah, that such children brought no good luck. Margaret kept a watchful eye upon her, but she often escaped. Sometimes she found her leaning over the well, or in strange, secluded places, with hands folded and eyes abstracted.

Gradually the clear air and constant out-

door life filled out the hollow cheeks, and Margaret waited patiently to see her smile. The child ate like a bird, picking here and there. She often carried a few crumbs from the table, by stealth, to feed the chickens, Margaret thought. She never allowed herself to be assisted in her dressing; and, if she saw any one regarding her, she would leave the room.

By degrees Margaret became accustomed to this curious little companion. She never attempted to caress her, or talked as one's instincts lead one to talk to merry, innocent childhood. She always appealed to Ida's judgment; she found it would not do to command.

Ida possessed an ungovernable temper, and in her rage always talked in Hindostanee, flinging about whatever came in her way, gesticulating with frantic violence. Once Margaret had tried to constrain her by force, and the result had frightened her.

One day Sarah came to Margaret with a puzzled face.

"You should look in the child's drawer," she said. Margaret followed Sarah with a half-nervous dread. On the bottom of one of the drawers were nicely arranged little piles of rice, several small sticks of foreign wood, a heap of bread-crumbs, half a candle, some raisins and nuts quite dried. These were carefully covered with a bit of fine gauze.

"They'll be sure to bring the mice," said Sarah; "what shall I do with them?"

"Let them alone for a while," said Margaret; "if we touch them it will throw her into a passion, and that causes her health to suffer."

They heard a step behind them. Ida had come in. Her strange eyes flashed.

"It is *very* impolite," she said, in her suppressed voice, and grand little manner, "to look in my drawers."

"She's right," said Sarah; "she's teaching us.

manners. You see the mice will come here, Miss Ida, and spoil the clothes."

Margaret had drawn guiltily away.

"Oh, no; the mice will never touch them," said Ida, promptly.

"But it's not a nice place for such things; shall I give you a pretty little box, with a cover to it, to put them in? It has a lock, and you can turn the key and keep them safe."

The child's whole face lighted up, for a rare second. She came quietly forward, took Margaret's hand, and touched it with her lips. Margaret knew not what to say; but her heart beat high with pleasure. She saw, too, that the curls of fair hair were coming out, very small and delicate; but the sight touched her. The child seemed like some little forlorn baby, whom she could not love. Presently Ida left the room.

"Well, if I ever!" cried Sarah; "she's the cutest little thing I ever saw in all my born

days. Nothing could be sweeter than the way she took your hand, though I'll be bound she won't do it again for a year, perhaps never. Depend upon it, it'll take time; but there's something worth cultivating there."

"I begin to believe she has a heart," Margaret murmured, in a low voice. "Poor little thing! she moaned in her sleep, the other night, for her nurse, and she kept repeating the word Sheve — 'O Sheve, Sheve!' I wonder what she meant? And I should like to know what charm she wears in that little bag. I never dared to touch it but once, and then she seemed to fly awake. I ought to respect the child's secret, I suppose."

"It is a 'manulet' to keep off sickness, perhaps," said Sarah, with a wise look.





CHAPTER XXIII.

"RELIGION DON'T TROUBLE ME."

THE child could not be coaxed to say Aunt Margaret, or even aunty. She rarely preferred a request of any kind, was restless in the house, and seldom ran, when out in the shady nooks that abounded at the farm.

She suffered much from the cold, even while the weather seemed still comparatively mild and warm to others; but rebelled against the thick aprons with long sleeves that Margaret made for her. After a sullen refusal to put one on, on her aunt's telling her that she would get cold, and perhaps permanently injure her health, she

ran upstairs to her own room, and brought down a fine cashmere shawl of great value, that had probably belonged to her mother. Margaret found her gravely wrapping herself in its folds, from head to foot, when she came downstairs.

"You should not wear that nice shawl, dear," she said, gently. The child looked at her frowningly.

"It's mine, — papa gave it to me. I don't think it's very nice. Alga let me wear it;" then, with a look of pain (it was the first time she had mentioned her nurse's name), she clapped both hands to her mouth, and ran from the room. Margaret let her go. She caught glimpses of her, now and then, walking like a little princess in her peacock splendor of plumage, the beautiful colors shining in the sun like transparent fibres.

"I am a puppet in her hands, already," sighed Margaret. "She is beyond all reach of disci-

pline ; what shall I do ? I wonder if Mr. Winthrop would advise me ? ”

“ Couldn’t you get her to learn her a b abs ? ” queried Sarah, who came in at that moment. “ Tommy’s on’y a year older’n her, and he’s in the First History. Gracious ! to think she’s going on for nine, and don’t even know her letters. ”

“ Look at her, Sarah, ” said Margaret, indicating where Ida could be seen.

“ What’s she got on ? ” cried Sarah, lifting up her hands.

“ A costly India shawl ; worth — I don’t dare to say how many hundred dollars. ”

“ Land o’ Goshen ! ” Sarah exclaimed, looking aghast, — “ and you let her ? ”

“ I couldn’t help it. She said it had been her mother’s. What could I do ? The child knows nothing of its value. She has been used to doing as she pleased all her life probably. ”

“ But she’ll spoil it ; there’s the fringe drag-

ging on the ground now; the saucy little chit!"

Sarah never scolded her; the child had taken her fancy.

"But, Miss Margaret," she added, "*that* nonsense must be stopped."

"I know it; but what can I do?" Margaret said helplessly. "Of course there will come a crisis; either she or I must rule; but if I get the power, I also incur her hatred, and I think she is just beginning to like me a little. I ponder upon the matter till my brain grows weary. If I could only touch her heart!"

"She'll be all right one o' these days, Miss Margaret; I wouldn't worry," said Sarah, cheerfully. Margaret sighed, said she wondered when, and went to watering her flowers.

Presently Ida came in.

"I don't like here at all," she said, petulantly. "I wish I had stayed in India. We have the warm sun, and the bright flowers, and foun-

tains, and trees full of roses. This is an ugly, uncomfortable country;" and she threw her shawl off where she stood.

"We mustn't throw shawls on the floor," said Margaret.

"I never picked up anything at home," cried Ida, blazing. "It is for the servants to do."

"Very well, I will be your servant then," said Margaret, gently, and went forward; but a pair of impatient little hands snatched it from the ground and whirled away, Ida with them.

Margaret sat down by the open door, and, for the first time for months, laughed heartily; But Ida's fit of questionable obedience was followed by dark looks, and she was silent and sullen for the rest of the day.

Margaret could only think of the words, "tormented by a devil," as she watched the child's restless features, and the strange, haughty, haunting eyes. She was never easy when Ida was present; the child seemed to fill

all the atmosphere with unrest. Once she ventured to say :—

“Who was Alga, my dear,—your Indian nurse?” but the child ran off with a low, pained cry.

In a thousand little ways Margaret tried to gain the child’s affections ; but Ida was guarded at all points, and the sweet speeches fell from her unimpressible armor.

Lettie came to the farm sometimes to see that “frightfully ugly child.” If possible Margaret kept her out of her way ; for at sight of her Ida went into a tremor of rage.

“She’s only an animal with instincts,” Lettie said, one day, when the child ran away from her.

“She is my brother Charley’s child,” retorted Margaret ; “and if ever you say that of her again in my hearing I shall beg you not to come where you can see her.”

“Well, you *have* a temper, haven’t you?”

Lettie said, quite coolly, — for she was not sensitive. "I thought, from Robert's frequent descriptions of your goodness, you were *almost* better than an angel. People say, too, — some people, — that you have got religion. I guess they are mistaken."

"I am sorry to say that I know they are," Margaret replied, humble at once. "I wish it were true. I think, if I had it, I could bear — some things better."

"I don't. Religion don't trouble me much, nor I it. I wouldn't be a long-faced, sanctimonious mope for the world. I couldn't even survive the winter in Salem. It's an awful bore as it is. I am tired of its sameness. Robert has got to take a house in the city the first of December. I should die here without theatre, opera, or anything."

"Robert going to take a house in town?" cried Margaret.

"Certainly he is," continued Lettie, twirling

her parasol. "Mr. Winthrop talks with him too much here; puts all manner of nonsense into his head, and I'm not going to have him converted into a psalm-singer. Why, you never thought I should settle down into a humdrum village madam, did you? No, thanks! I'm obliged to you all the same, but it's not my style at all."

"You wouldn't go, though, if Robert wished you not to?"

"Yes, I would. It shall be as *I* say in such matters. I don't meddle with his business."

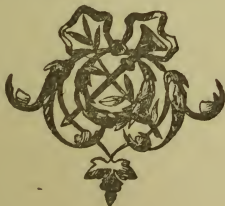
"Robert is very sensitive."

"Oh, yes, you two are paragons in each other's eyes. I often tell him he was foolish to marry me and break up such *tender* relations. Why, you might have been the pattern couple of Salem!"

Margaret bit her lips, for her blood was not cold. These little shafts had no power to hurt her; but, to tender, chivalrous Robert, with

his keen appreciation and long-cherished idea of home comfort, how very hard such daily thrusts must be !

“ Well, I must go,” said Lettie, springing up. “ I’m deep in work for the winter. Sent for a dress-maker, — none of the Salemites could suit me. I’m going to have three flounced dresses : white, black, and silver gray. If you want any patterns, come over, and you shall have mine. And pray, when you see Robert, don’t encourage him in those frightfully serious notions that are getting into his head. I’ve no aptitude myself for the ‘ piosities,’ as a delightful friend of mine used to call them ; for dance I must, this winter, and dance I will, if it’s the last chance I ever have in my life.”





CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MINISTER'S THOUGHT-BOOK.



INTO that pleasant room called the minister's study let us enter for a few moments.

Reuben Winthrop was neatness personified. Purity and cleanliness did not seem "put on" with him. It was not the man's linen, boots, hands, that impressed one with his delicacy, — it was the man himself, clean to the core.

No disgusting habits marked his career; nothing unclean touched his lips, or proceeded therefrom.

Clean all through, — clean in thoughts, de-

sires, and habits; clean in the temple, in the sanctuary of home. Do you say this is not possible? It is possible to the man who has taken Christ to reign over him,— whose body is a temple of the Holy Ghost, — whose hands are lifted night and morning in supplication for purity.

A woman could not be more fastidiously delicate than Reuben Winthrop. His mother had been his teacher till he entered college.

Happy those who have such mothers, intelligent, high-hearted, lofty in courage, sublime in faith! His father had died when he was an infant, and this woman had reared a child for God. She gave him her fearlessness, her tenderness, her modesty; she weekly wrote letters to him, as if he had been at school, which were an education in themselves. She lived for him, moulded all his tastes, and, unlike many women who are of to-day, — butterflies in the world of fashion, — desired no greater field of usefulness.

Through him she touched the sympathies and directed the lives of a great multitude. No wonder he never spoke of her but his eyes filled with tears. Her picture hung in his sanctum, — a lovely, thoughtful face, with a broad brow, and beautiful, smiling eyes, that always seemed to follow his glances. It was pleasant to look up to her, in the pauses of his study, and smile, and nod to her.

The room looked out upon green fields, over which autumn had already thrown dashes of vivid color.

It was a cheerful apartment. 'On three sides there were books.

He spent large sums of money on books. His living did not cost much, — milk and fruit, honey and cream in the summer, with little meat, and as nearly as possible the same diet through the winter months.

He was very sensitive with regard to his food. Some people thought him a dyspeptic, because

at their groaning tables he ate of the simplest things.

His study was not carpeted. He held that in such places, and in sleeping-rooms, carpets were unhealthy. A few choice pictures hung from the wall; lace curtains draped the windows.

His "*Thought-Book*" laid open before him. He had an almost morbid dread of a diary.

"It is like building a dissecting-room in one's house," he said.

But there was a something needed; a jotting down, here and there, of sudden illuminations, — mind-pictures, which were revealed sometimes to his spirit eyes. Sometimes he picked a nut in a word, from which he extracted sound and wholesome meat.

Let me lay bare a page or two of this Thought-Book.

———"I am climbing, step by step, into the quiet and calmness of a settled faith. I say no more, '*Why* is this allowed?' or '*Why* did God

in his infinite goodness allow this to happen? If I ever attain to perfect righteousness in this world, when death comes, it will be only stepping from one heaven to another.

——— "Will the gates be pearly? Will the streets be golden? Will there be gates and streets? Something in my soul answers Yes. Shall we limit the power of the mighty Architect of the universe?

"I shall walk, see, love, and oh! inexpressibly glorious, I shall live and talk with my Jesus.

"'It doth not yet appear what we shall be.'

"Nor do I wish it to. Enough that we shall be there. Enough that it is heaven, with God on the throne.

——— "The sacred imagination of my heart has always been to form a picture of Jesus. How will this God, revealed in the flesh, look to our startled eyes? I have seen many beautiful pictures of Christ, but they have never satisfied me. Here, *he* is portrayed as the Man of

Sorrows ; there he will be the *King of Triumph*.

"Little May Davis, when she was dying, her cold hand in mine, cried out, with a great and joyful cry : —

" ' O minister, I see Jesus ! ' "

"David Martins, the holiest old saint I ever knew, remarked with almost his latest breath : —

" ' Last night I had a sweet, refreshing talk with my Saviour. He came here and filled the room with his glory. It was as if the air were filled with stars. ' "

—— "The fact is, the experiences of a man's religious life, if he is terribly in earnest, are so transcendent, so entirely out of the common order of things, that it is hard to impress the average intelligence with the fact of its supernatural power.

"I do not wonder, sometimes, that men listen with bewildered faces, as if they would say, It

is the dream of an enthusiast. The man is peculiarly constituted. Things are not exactly what they seem to him. He would see a garden in a flower; a world in a drop of water; a forest in a shrub.'

"Yet when these same stolid hearts yield themselves up, with childlike simplicity, they, too, see the miracle of a new heaven and a new earth.

———"Jesus, my soul floats up to thee on the atmosphere of love. Thou Brightness of the Father's glory! let me but touch the hem of thy shining garment, and I shall be whole.

———"There is a stir in Salem. I am getting hold of the people. I see a difference in their demeanor; some listen as for their life.

"Among these are Robert Ransom, and his sister Margaret. I would I could say the same of Mrs. Ransom. Her utter indifference chills me. I do not mind a frown, a stealthy shake of the head, or downright opposition; but the

careless glancing about; the well-bred yawn under delicately kidded fingers; the tapping of some remembered music with fan or parasol, — these throw me off my balance, and, if I am not careful, I find myself making extraordinary efforts, not to preach Jesus, but — Reuben Winthrop; as if *I* held souls in my hand.

——— "I love children. Some of the lambs are coming into the fold. They are seeking for Jesus. Too young, too young! say some of the old members. What, too young to come into the fold of safety? to leave the places of the ravening wolves, who seek for their destruction? Too young to be enfolded in the loving arms of Jesus? Too young to serve their God, and to begin the building up of a life of piety and virtue? No — no. Jesus knew their little hearts, when his undefiled lips repeated: —

" 'Of such is the kingdom of heaven.'

——— "Some of my people are crying out over looseness of doctrine which prevails in

Salem. I can do nothing to correct it but preach Jesus. There have always been loose opinions; there always will be, perhaps, while the world stands; but to my heart there is but one cry: Preach Jesus! preach Jesus!

"There is but ONE WAY. Oh, how my heart rests upon that declaration! Do what we will, say what we will, believe as we will, there is ONE ONLY WAY.

"'Whosoever cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out.'

"In this faith, therefore, am I rooted and grounded,—in the faith once delivered to the saints.

"Help me, O Lamb of God! Thou **that** takest away the sins of the world!"





CHAPTER XXV.

THE IDOL WORSHIPPER.



TAP at the door, light as if made by fairy fingers.

"Well, Birdie!" and the minister laid down his pen. The girl was almost breathless.

"Ruby, come downstairs; *she* is here."

He pushed the pen-handle through his hair; looked annoyed for a moment.

"I have caught her as one would catch a bird, and coaxed her in."

Reuben's expression changed to blank astonishment.

"She's the queerest thing! I wouldn't have

her go without your seeing her. She's busy now, with the idols and things."

"Who are you speaking of, dear?"

"Why, of that child, Miss Margaret's little niece."

"Oh, and if I go down, I may frighten her away."

"No, no; *do* come, Ruby."

He followed Birdie, smiling at her earnestness, and stood at the foot of the staircase, which commanded a view of the parlor. Looking in, he was struck motionless. Did his senses deceive him, or was that child in the act of adoration before those dumb monstrosities, the gods of India?

It could not be; the attitude must be purely accidental. She was on her knees, to be sure, and she made genuflexions; but probably these were only the natural movements of one who had been familiar with such things. Some sudden noise struck the child's ear. She turned

her head slowly, saw Reuben and his sister, and, with a little scream, sprang to her feet, trying to pass them; but Birdie cried, in her kind little voice:—

“Don’t go! There are other things in the cabinet I want to show you.”

The child hung her head in the old, sullen fashion, and looked from under her straight, thin eyebrows, turning neither to the right nor left.

“You have seen these things before,” said Reuben, feeling a sudden interest in the strange child.

“He is the great god Sheve,” replied the child, with a solemn little emphasis, indicating the hideous manikin with her tiny forefinger.

“Dreadful, isn’t it?” whispered Birdie, her eyes fastened upon the distorted face of the idol,—all the stories she had ever heard, of sacrifices and impious worship, crossing her mind.

The child had started at the words, and was now watching her with a strangely perplexed expression.

"He can't hear, you know, little one. He's a poor, miserable bit of wood, and has neither eyes, nor ears, nor anything." She reached forth her hand, and gave the idol a pat on its monstrous ear, when over it toppled, falling at the feet of the child. It looked like a premeditated blow, and Birdie laughed.

But the child stood white and scared, and fixed as a statue; her hands half-raised, her face expressing fear, anger, horror. Her lips quivered, her nostrils dilated. She glared at the minister's sister, poured out what seemed to be a fierce tirade in Hindostanee, then, kneeling reverently, she carefully lifted the image, tenderly saluted it, and again falling upon her knees, replaced the idol where it had stood, and gravely, yet with a certain majesty, walked out of the room.

Birdie drew a long breath.

"O Reuben!" she cried, "what did it all mean?" Her eyes were full of tears.

Reuben had not stirred. The thing had passed before him like a vision. He seemed still to see the kneeling child, and her act of reverence.

"I thought at last I should make a friend of her; and, in some way, I have frightened her."

"I wonder if the Ransoms know of this?" queried Reuben, still in a maze.

"Of what — surely, Reuben — you can't think — that little child is an — idolater!"

"I *know* she is."

"O Reuben, how dreadful!" and his sister regarded the image with a look of horror.

"Now I understand," she continued, "why she glared at me so. And how furious were her gestures — her language! Did you understand her, Ruby?"

"Partly," he replied ; "she doubtless thought you threw the image down in contempt."

"But I didn't."

"Of course not ; children and idolaters never stop to reason."

Ida, after her passionate outburst, had run nearly all the way to the farm. Her nerves were thrilled and on fire, as if she had received a studied insult. The words of her nurse sounded in her brain : —

"They hate us, and they hate our religion."

Presently, as she ran moaning aloud with passion and with grief, she stumbled over something, and felt a pair of strong arms enclose her.

Jean, the son of Mrs. Rhoda, was lying down in the long grass after finishing his luncheon. This child was an eyesore to him ; she had always repelled his advances. He often said to himself that she was a witch, and that he hated her.

"Now I've got you!" he cried, triumphantly. The child struggled a moment, and then waited with haughty composure.

"You never would speak to me, you little witch!" he said, coarsely; "proud of your Injun blood, I suppose. Been brought up with princes, and all sorts o' great characters, eh?"

The child looked at him with superb indifference. Had she been utterly deaf she could not have seemed more careless of all sound.

"You won't speak, you imp!" he continued, shaking her a little; "come, are you going to speak? Speak, or I'll throw you into the river!"

She looked at him like a dumb thing. She had learned from her nurse how to be reticent, and even stolid. The only indication she showed of her suffering was a pressure of the small lips, and her quick breathing.

"Come along, then," he said, rising, still holding her by the arm. She resisted with her

small strength, but it availed nothing. After a while she moved passively till they neared the river. Silent, and stubbornly defiant with her eyes, she went on, unflinching, till they reached the swiftly running stream.

"Now I'm going to put you in."

He lifted her by the shoulders. She only turned her head, and looked down once into the water — drew a quick, shuddering breath.

"Well, you're one of 'em," the man exclaimed with coarse emphasis, slowly bringing her down again. He had grown pale himself. "You've good grit, Injun or not," he muttered; "but I hate you, for all that. You've got no soul, that's the reason, you little heathen! Now go, and tell your aunt that I tried to drown you; go."

She looked at him, when he released her, one long look of defiance, then moved slowly away, while he stood watching her. But the seeds of her education were springing up. In her poor

little, bewildered mind she felt one great, absorbing hatred for the whole race of Christians. Passionately, and with a swelling heart, she longed for the land of her birth.

Margaret was looking for her, frightened at her long absence. When she saw her, Ida gave one pitiful, dry sob, that sounded strangely in a child.

"Where have you been, my dear?" asked Margaret, startled at her unusual palor; but the child, deigning no answer, ran by her into the house, flew up the stairs to her own room, where she fell upon the floor, utterly exhausted.

Sarah found her there, fast asleep, a fixed, hard look upon her face, which yet showed the traces of tears.

"You poor little motherless creature!" she murmured; "it's a sad sight to see you throw them aside that would love and cherish you. The Lord help you, that's all."



CHAPTER XXVI.

TOO MUCH FOR MARGARET.

SHE don't say no prayers, — don't know any, not even "Our Father." I tried to make her kneel while I said one for her, but she scrambled into bed like a cat, and scratched me in the bargain." Sarah exhibited the wound.

"Did she do that purposely?"

"No, I don't think she did," said candid Sarah; "but the critter riles me, and I can't help it. She mustn't go to sleep like a heathen, Miss Margaret."

Margaret leaned back, a weary look in her face.

"She is too much for me, Sarah."

"Not if you'll only take the upper hand, and keep it. She's got to be conquered," added Sarah, grimly.

"How?"

"'Spare the rod, and spoil the child.'"

"I'll never raise my hand to Charley's child," said Margaret, with vehemence.

"Well, as for that, Charley's child's as likely to go to ruin, for want of discipline, as anybody else's child. If you *can't* rule her, Miss Margaret, you must put her where she will be ruled. What do you say to school?"

"She'd break down, she is so delicate."

"Yes, there's something in that. I don't know who could bear with her, for gracious knows she *can* be aggravating enough. But then, when you take into consideration how the poor thing has been brought up, by heathen, it aint so dretful surprisin'. But I would learn her to say her prayers, or the child'll grow up in a Christian

country, 'thout knowing whether she's got a soul or not."

"I'll try," said Margaret, and went softly upstairs. Ida's door was bolted on the inside. A light shone from under the door. For an instant Margaret thought the house was on fire, and shook the door violently. Presently she heard the bolt slide.

As she opened the door, Ida glided away, and sprang up on the bed.

"Was there a light here, Ida?" asked Margaret.

No answer.

"I shall punish you unless you tell me, Ida," said Margaret, a sudden sternness in her voice.

The clothes shook a little, but Ida had buried her face in the pillow. Margaret thought she was weeping, and grew tender on the moment. Should she appeal to the child's heart?—plead, pray, or threaten? She knelt down by the bedside and whispered a prayer. Then she stroked

the child's soft curls, that were quite thick now, and it troubled her to feel her shrinking away from the touch.

"Ida, won't you let me love you?" she cried, almost passionately. "I am your dear father's sister, your Aunt Margaret, he used to tell you about. You don't know how terribly my heart is aching, — how I want you to love me. Come and kiss me, just once."

There was no response.

Margaret grew chill and proud; she would never plead again, she said to herself, and slowly left the room. Something prompted her to stop in the hall, and she distinctly heard the child rise, after a few moments, and draw the bolt again.

"It is a warfare from beginning to end," she said to herself. "The child is mentally diseased. Sometimes it seems as if I held a poisonous serpent in my household. Without heart, without feeling, I fear it is too true, as Lettie says, she

has only instincts. But even brute creatures can be taught to love something."

She went sadly downstairs, and found Robert there.

"I rode down to the mill," he said, "and thought I wouldn't go by without speaking, though I can't stop long. How are you getting along with little Ida?"

"But poorly. I am quite discouraged."

"You had better send her to school. I can't have you looking like this."

"Yes, I suppose I shall have to," she replied, wearily. "When do you go to the city?"

"I don't want to go the city at all; I am tempted to say that I hate the city," said Robert, in a moody voice. "But I suppose I must succumb," he added, speaking more lightly. "I can't stand a woman's tears; but she ought not to go. She's not a bit well, and one more winter's excitement will do her a serious injury. I have coaxed and expostulated, and all but com-

manded ; but Lettie's mind is made up. Come over and talk with her about it, won't you?"

"I should have no influence, Robert, not the slightest. However, I'm coming over soon. I'll try what I can do."

"God bless you, old Maggie ! There's no knowing what a word might do, spoken in the right season. Well, I must go."

"I'll walk down to the road with you, Robert ; it's an exquisite moonlight." He was silent after he had mounted his horse, and that was not like Robert.

"It makes a fellow happier, after all, to look on a scene like this," he said, after a pause. "By the way, when you do come to the house, bring the child with you. What's that up there ? The room is alight, and the child is moving about. You can't see her, maybe, but I can."

Margaret told him her recent experience.

"She's a strange little character," said Robert.

"Pity you can't find the way to her heart."

"I wonder if she has one?" murmured Margaret.

"Oh, yes; you'll find the key to it some day. She's a child, and there's hope of *her*," he sighed, heavily. "But what in the world can she be doing?"

"I can't imagine," said Margaret.

"You must bear in mind that she came from a country of idol-worshippers," said Robert, significantly.

Margaret looked up, startled.

"I am afraid that Charley was so immersed in business that he thought little of those things that are necessary to the bringing up of a well-behaved child. Possibly she was left altogether to the care of hired nurses."

"She was."

"Watch her then. Good-night, and be sure to come over to-morrow, if you can."



CHAPTER XXVII.

A LITTLE LIGHT.



MARGARET pondered upon Robert's parting words. She arranged matters so that she could visit the child's room by unlocking an unused door. She remembered that a fragrance, like the smell of burning wood or spice, permeated the atmosphere sometimes.

The next day was rainy. Ida was busy in Margaret's room. She sometimes resorted to a pretty but curious employment, when detained within doors. Margaret had given her some boxes full of rare South American shells and pebbles, unique and beautiful. With them she

often built strange little mounds and pyramids and altars. When Margaret went downstairs she had just finished one, and was surveying its proportions with unusual interest.

"How very pretty!" said Margaret.

The child started, and by accident threw down the edifice.

"She is too hateful!" muttered Margaret, who thought it was purposely done. But presently she noticed that the child went to work again, and that her earnestness, and evident pleasure in the task, brought a color into her cheeks, and a cool, clear light in her eyes.

"She would be so pretty if there was any affection in her," sighed Margaret to herself. Presently Sarah brought in a letter. It was from John, and full of the fragrance of Italy. He sent her some dried flowers that the Pope had blessed; described the Vatican as religiously as if he were taking an inventory; not one word

of belief or unbelief, and that was unusual. The concluding part of his letter ran thus : —

“I think you must be half sick of your bargain to devote yourself to Charley’s child. Remember you have only to say the word, and I will come on for you. My house seems desolate, with no woman to preside, and I get very weary for a talk with you. We wouldn’t fight, Margaret ; perhaps I might concede more than I have. Come and see the splendors of the old, and the glory of the new.”

Ida was very still as Margaret closed her letter, half inclined to give up this struggle, send the child to some school, and let John come and take her. Suddenly, at a slight sound, Margaret turned round.

The child stood in front of an old-fashioned mirror, gazing in such an earnest, sorrowful way at herself, that Margaret was startled. Sometimes she would slowly pull out the short curls. Presently the child left the glass, and

seated herself to look over a book that was full of oriental sketches, and Margaret was surprised to hear her say, in a low voice : —

“ I like that.”

The very tone was music. She could see the picture over Ida’s shoulder, — a man and woman with very dark faces, dressed in long linen garments.

“ Do they dress like that in India, dear ? ” she softly asked. Ida was reticent again ; she only answered “ Yes,” in her usually repellant manner.

“ Don’t you think they dress much prettier here ? ”

“ No ; I don’t like the people here ; they are *too white*.”

“ This is getting on,” said Margaret to herself.

“ But your father was white, Ida.”

“ I know it ; but he didn’t love me much.”

“ It is the first time she has ever spoken the word love,” thought Margaret.

"Oh, yes; I am sure he loved you," said Margaret, a little indignantly. "He told me he loved you, in his letters."

Ida was as intent upon her book as if she had been dumb since morning.

A new idea came to Margaret.

"Now, if you only knew how to read, Ida, you might learn all about the country you have left, as well as the one you are in."

Ida shut her book deliberately, and walked out of the room.

"Failure!" exclaimed Margaret, though she could not help laughing at the child's dignified retreat. "It would be of no earthly use to have a governess; she could do no more than I can," she said.

Ida found her way to Mrs. Rhoda's domains. That worthy woman was very busy, making apple-butter, of which she sold great quantities to the people round about. The child stood watching her, her mind evidently preoccupied

"Come and learn how to cook," said the little French woman.

"That is for the servants," said Ida, in a stately way.

"Very well; then come and learn to be a servant. 'Tis all you are fit for, you little thin-skinned toad!"

Ida turned away with flashing eyes; her poor little heart was full of hatred.

On the day of the first snow-storm, Margaret found her gazing from the window in a tremor of delight. She tried to explain to her how, when the cold weather comes, the rain congeals and forms those pretty little floating stars. Ida caught a snow-flake, and cried out rapturously in Hindostanee; she pressed the tiny flake to her cheek and lips.

"After all, there must be some latent warmth in her nature," murmured Margaret. All day long Margaret busied herself with the snow. For the first time she listened with interest while

Margaret told her of the sports of the north, and how her mother, when a little child like herself, had frolicked in the deep drifts, and made balls to pelt her companions with.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

A NEW TRIAL.



MARGARET'S little parlor was brilliant with coal and candle-light. Ida was in bed, and a parcel of fresh magazines had just been sent up by Robert; one of them laid open upon the table beside her.

Red curtains, red cloth, and red carpet, made this little snuggerly very attractive. Margaret had decided that life was rather pleasant, under some circumstances. She was fond of sinking back in her father's old easy-chair, and falling into a reverie, her eyes fixed upon the glowing coals. A litle tap at the door, a rustling —

"Miss Margaret, may I come in?" asked Sarah.

"Certainly;" and Margaret roused herself. She saw that Sarah's face was full of trouble and mystery.

"Miss Margaret, I *was* coming to tell you that Tommy got the gold medal to-day; but let that pass. I'm shocked; I can hardly speak."

"Ida!" exclaimed Margaret, springing up. It was always possible to imagine her in trouble.

"She's all right; that is, she's *not* all right by any means; but she is upstairs, though not in her bed."

"Not abed?"

Sarah nodded her head with an air of mystery, then solemnly said:—

"But you'd better go upstairs yourself, Miss Margaret. I'm sure *my* senses is shook!"

"What is she doing, Sarah?"

"Just you creep up there and see, Miss Mar-

garet; don't lose no time, or the precious opportunity may go by. Well, if I ever!"

Margaret followed Sarah, all alive with curiosity. The long-unused door was standing ajar, so that the range of the room could be taken.

Margaret could see a little table covered with white, before which knelt Ida on two pillows, in lieu of a cushion. A small image stood before her, to which she was sacrificing the bits of bread, and rice, and nuts, and raisins. There could be no mistake about it; she distinctly saw the child sprinkle the image, bow down with many a genuflection before it, keeping up a strange muttering in her native Hindostanee. Then the eatables were offered to the hideous little image of Sheve, and then came more posturing and more prayers.

It was a new and terrible feature to Margaret. She had never, even after Robert's hint, imagined that the child could be an idolater. Stand-

ing there in the cold, in a sort of horror, she was only conscious that here was the root of the deformity of soul in Charley's child.

There was no fire in the room, and the wind whistled fiercely without; the sleety snow beat against the window-pane, but the glow of her heathen devotion must have kept the child warm.

At last she rose from her lowly position, placed the horrible squat image in a little bag, attached to the chain she always wore about her neck, kissed it rapturously, laid away with extreme care and much ceremony the little piles of rice and nuts and sweets, odorous wood and holy water, which latter she poured carefully into a wide-mouthed bottle, put out her bit of candle, and then in the dark crept into bed.

Margaret went downstairs, Sarah following her, both chilled through. They entered the warm snuggerly, so lately vacated; but to Margaret's eyes everything seemed unreal. She

could still smell the incense of the foreign wood ; she could still see the child, an epitome, it seemed to her, of the strange, dark world beyond the sea, — the spirit of idolatry.

The two women stood and looked at each other, Margaret's eyes wide and shining, her hands tightly clasped together.

"Sarah, I never dreamed of this," said Margaret.

"Nor I neither, Miss Margaret. The child come of Christian people too !"

"Poor Charley ! Why, Sarah, it must not be ; it horrifies me ! Idol worship beneath this roof, where so many good men and women have served God ! In the very room where my pious mother died !"

"It is awful, Miss Margaret. I don't know what *can* be done, unless we pray for her. No wonder she's a strange child."

"It's the work of her nurses probably," said Margaret. "What more natural than that they

should teach her the Hindoo worship, having her completely in their power? They have filled the child's mind with poison. Oh, Charley should have taken better care of his poor little motherless girl!"

Sarah shook her head ruefully.

"I should die if it was Tommy," she said. "I jest felt like going and flinging all them things right out of the winder; 'specially that little grinning idol. Dear me! to think that under our roof we should have such goings-on! It's a sacrilege."

"Yes, it is very dreadful," said Margaret, sinking back again into her easy-chair. "I must think of this. I dare not take the matter in my own hands, for who knows what the child might do? She is older than her years. She throws all the energy of her soul into that fearful worship. Think, Sarah," she cried, with sudden consternation, "of that child spending nearly an hour in the patient worship of that

hideous lump of clay, while we — or I should speak only for myself, I suppose — well, seldom count our prayers by moments.”

“Surely the heathen is a reproach to us, the good Book says,” responded Sarah; “let me send you more coal.”

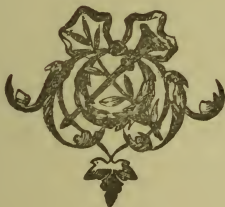
The spiritual and the practical were often blended in Sarah’s matter-of-fact mind.

“But then you see,” she added, as she came in again, “*that’s* all form. When we *do* pray, let it be hoped that it’s with the spirit and the understanding also.”

When Sarah left her again, Margaret felt that she now had something to think of. The mystery of the locked door and the lighted room was solved. She saw now that the child expressed her feelings in an unlovely manner, because conscious that she was among the enemies of her religion. How was she to tell the child what she had found out? In what way strive to impress upon her poor, little, darkened soul

that she was blindly following the path of those who hated God?

"In this I *must* have help," she said. "I dare not work by myself, lest I frighten or disgust the poor child. And how can I show her the way, unless I walk myself in it? And how shall I find the way any better than this child? Lord, I do try to believe; help thou my unbelief; show me the way."





CHAPTER XXIX.

BIRDIE'S DREAM.

BIRDIE was dusting the trophies of many a missionary from the deaf and the blind in spiritual solitudes, when she felt, rather than saw, that somebody was coming.

"Are you alone, Birdie?"

"Yes, Miss Margaret. Ruby has gone to the Pines. It's a splendid morning, isn't it? Did you ever see the leaves look more beautiful? Take a seat by the fire."

"How cosey and comfortable you always look here!" said Margaret, shuddering as she caught the malignant glance of an ugly little idol.

"Yes; the sea-coal gives such a lovely glow; it's almost like burning wood. Won't you spend the day with me? I see so little company."

"I would with pleasure, Birdie," said Margaret, "but I can't leave Ida long."

Birdie grew suddenly serious.

"She comes up here quite often," she said.

"Ida comes here!"

"Yes, these frightful little manikins seem to attract her." Margaret's glances fell; a look of pain came over her face.

Birdie put by her duster, and drew a little low seat by Margaret's knee, sitting down herself so that she could look up into her face.

"Miss Margaret, something troubles you," she said.

"Please call me Margaret; that 'Miss' sounds formal," said her visitor, smiling sadly. "I am in a little trouble, which I will tell you about some time. Meanwhile, how do you keep your-

self so happy. 'How do you manage to look so fresh and cheerful all the time?'

"I'm a body of so little importance," laughed Birdie, "that I seem to be actually nothing of myself; and it is pleasant to live with and work for Ruby. Not that I have much to do, but it's a pleasure just to be with him. I wasn't always so. I used to be a little, heartless thing, thinking only of my own needs, and selfishly careless of others' comfort, until I had the illness that made me lame, as you see me now. Ah, how I loved life then!" she exclaimed, looking into the fire. "I was infatuated; all my mother's warnings and her lovely example could not have kept me from the pleasures which I desired. All I longed for was to be rich, that I might plunge into the gay world. I was like a thoughtless bird, pleased with its pretty plumage, singing its merry song, and never giving one moment to serious thought.

"Then I fell ill, and my sickness was very

painful. I was not only a sufferer in body, but in mind. I grew moody, fretful, and despairing. Sometimes people talked to me about being resigned, and bearing the afflictions sent upon me, in a matter-of-fact way that made me want to throw something at them. Reading became a torture; my summer friends all left me; I dreaded the sight of my acquaintances.

"My darling mother never reproached me, but bore with my changed moods like an angel. Her sweet, patient smile was my harshest rebuke, and often, when she thought me sleeping, she knelt by my bedside and prayed for me. Her lips seldom moved, but I felt, by the solemn hush, by something which I cannot describe, that she *was* praying for me.

"At last her constant attendance on me caused her illness, and then you see I had nobody to pray for me; so I began to pray for myself, feebly at first, for I was both ashamed

and afraid, Christian though I had been educated.

"One night I fell asleep after suffering great pain. I thought I was wandering about in ragged, dirty clothes, searching for a diamond. It had always been the height of my ambition to own a diamond ring, you must know. The journey seemed endless, and with every step I seemed to be transformed into something more and more hideous. Presently I came to the mouth of a cave, crying at my changed appearance, — for I had always been proud of dressing well, — and I heard the most seraphic music. I shall never hear such this side of heaven again. I remember saying to myself "if I could only get me some good clean garments, I would never care for the ring."

"As I went on, the cave grew higher; soft, unearthly lights appeared, so fine and yet so sparkling.

"At last I came out on a spacious, beautiful garden. Flowers that seemed to burn and

breathe were growing on every side. The leaves appeared to have lamps under them, so brilliant was their coloring. I was very much ashamed of my appearance, when suddenly an angel came, and threw something over my head.

"All at once I felt that my garments were pure, spotless, and beautiful. Voices sounded near me; birds warbled in the air; and such a seraphic peace took possession of me that I seemed to move on air. All around me silvery waterfalls were flashing and murmuring; on every hand the whitest and loveliest statuary gleamed amid the living green.

"Then came towards me one I knew for the *Master*. I cannot describe his appearance. Oh, such a glorious countenance! My soul leaped in a wonderful ecstasy at the sight. As he drew nearer, the music grew triumphant. Beautiful flowers sprang up at every step he took; whichever way he looked the leaves took on a softer

lustre. Sweetest voices seemed chanting close by my ear : —

“ ‘This is the Christ.’

“ He came nearer,” — and Birdie’s voice began to tremble, — “ he laid his hand on my poor, deformed shoulder, and a great transport seized me. I felt well, clean, light, transparent. Looking down, I saw my garments shone whiter than snow. On my finger gleamed a diamond of such wonderful brilliancy that it seemed almost to blind me. It was on this finger of my right hand, and do you know I had lost the use of that finger during my sickness, and from that night my finger was as well as the rest.

“ When I awakened, the very room seemed filled full with a soft, dreamy light. I called my mother, and told her my vision, for I never could make it seem anything else.

“ From that day to this, I think I have loved the *Master*. I never told this to any one but

you, out of my own family. Miss Margaret, perhaps some time you will know what it is to leave all, and follow Him."





CHAPTER XXX.

THE GREAT CHANGE.



WISH I might, dear Birdie," said Margaret, her eyes shining with tears. "I think you have done me a great deal of good."

"Then I am glad I told you. Perhaps the dear Lord sent you here this morning just to hear that."

"I don't doubt it, dear," responded Margaret; "but I must go now. I should like to see your brother this evening. Will you tell him so?"

"I will," said Birdie; and with a loving kiss Margaret left her little comforter.

Robert came up to the farm that evening. Margaret was more than glad.

"I wanted to send for you," she said, "but there was nobody to go."

"Margaret," he said, passing his arm gently about her waist, "look at me."

She did look at him. At the moment his face seemed an illumination.

"Something changes your very countenance," she said, wonderingly. "What is it?"

"I have great and glorious news for you, Margaret," he said, his face still radiant. "I have found peace in believing, — utter, unwavering peace."

"O Robert, I am so glad for you!" and, hiding her face on his shoulder, Margaret wept, partly for joy, partly for disappointment, to feel that she was left alone, more alone now than ever.

"I haven't had an uneasy or an unhappy moment since," he continued, in a soft, musical voice. "I have given up all my care. I have

forgotten all my disappointments. A new life, a new world, seems to open before me. I live for a purpose, since last night. Heaven is something real to me now. Christ is no longer a myth. Dear Margaret, I bless the day that Mr. Winthrop ever came amongst us."

"Does Lettie know it?" asked Margaret, as soon as she could command her voice.

"Poor little Lettie, I told her first. Yes, she knows."

"And will she be willing to give up the city this winter?"

"No, dear; she shall have her way. We didn't talk of that; but I know how she feels. I shall set the whole matter before her, and I will try my best to make her contented and happy. I wish she could be brought to see what I see. How vain and empty the things she seeks would appear to her! Why, the trees were hung with precious stones, and the leaves sparkled with diamonds, as I came along the

road. I've often laughed at people who talked as if the world was all new to them ; but if it had come fresh from the hand of Deity, this afternoon, it could not have seemed more strangely beautiful."

"I am so glad for you, Robert ! I wish — I wish," — her lip quivered, her eyes were troubled and pleading.

"You have only got to do as I did, dear," he said, softly. "This matter has been hanging off and on in my mind for a great many months ; in fact ever since I heard that sermon I spoke to you about, when the world looked so poor to me. I tell you what, Margaret, I believe it is a great thing to have had a religious ancestry."

"But then one must search, as for hid treasure. It's not within sight and reach always ; it is hidden sometimes ; but the finding — the finding is a reward, Margaret, beyond my power to describe. I can feel and enjoy it though."

"I am so glad for you!" Margaret repeated again.

"I felt as if I must come up, at my first leisure, and tell you about it. One don't feel like hiding such a light under a bushel. At first, I thought I should like to stand in the market-place, and cry aloud to the people, 'Ho! every one that thirsteth!' and I shan't rest till Lettie is going with me, hand in hand."

After a little conversation, Margaret laid Ida's case before him; but before he could quite appreciate the story, Mr. Winthrop came in.

"Congratulate me, sir," cried Robert, with a glad smile, as he shook hands heartily; "your preaching has not always fallen upon barren ground. Thank God, I have sought the truth and found it!"

The minister's face was a study just then.

Robert Ransom was the last convert he expected to rejoice over. There was an indescribable pathos in the voice with which he said : —

“My soul is exceedingly glad !”

It seemed indeed as if he could not sufficiently express his joy.

He listened with interest, but by no means the astonishment that Margaret seemed to expect, when she told him of Ida's strange worship.

“I have known it for some time,” he said, quietly, and he repeated what he had seen in his own little parlor.

“I concluded that the child had early fallen into the hands of some devotees,” he said, “and been thoroughly indoctrinated in the rites of Hindoo worship. I have made it a subject of much thought ; how shall we rescue her ?”

“I know not what to do. I am utterly helpless,” said Margaret.

"I should advise patient waiting," said the minister, after an interval of silence. 'In time, the heart that seems so cold and lifeless must respond. She has evidently a remarkably tenacious memory, and wonderful power of concentration; these, united to a strong will, preclude the possibility of doing anything by force. Were you to destroy her idol, and treat her faith with harshness, there would be an end to all sympathy between you. My advice to you is, not to let her know that you are aware of this dreadful perversity. Allow her to go on for a while. God is very patient, — far more patient than the holiest Christian living, — and he has borne with an innumerable company of idolaters. I think the time will come when you can reason with her, and she will hear you."

As Margaret listened, there flashed through her mind the memory of that house-top prayer. And there came over her, with dreadful force, the fear that she, too, had been an idol worship-

per all her life. Why, then, should she feel so horror-struck over the errors of an unfortunate child, who, unlike herself, knew no other way?





CHAPTER XXXI.

IDA'S TRANSFORMATION.



THE next day was like a pearl of the summer shining in winter setting. Margaret had not slept well, and was languid and unrefreshed.

"I ought to go down to Robert's this beautiful day," she said to Sarah, as she rose from the breakfast table.

"The carriage aint mended yet, and the cart is going to draw apples to-day," replied Sarah. "Besides, the horses are both out in the field."

"I can walk."

"Yes; and a sight better it will be for you. Besides, Ida has got her new suit on to-day, and

she's mightily pleased with it. I never see her look and act so much like a child before."

"Was she *really* pleased?"

"Really! I guess so. She must have thought of old times, the way she went on. I suppose you'll take her for company."

"Yes, if I can have her. If she don't want to go, you know I can't force her."

"I know; but she's getting a little more reasonable of late. I guess she'll go."

For once, the child was willing, — seemed, in her strange way, to be pleased even.

"Shall I ever see a genuine smile on her face?" Margaret asked herself.

"Tell Mr. Robert how glad I am," cried Sarah, from the door. "You know what for. I've carried him on my prayers when he was a baby, and ever sence, till now," she added. "Take the walk slow and quiet; it's a good mile, you know. Stop a minute at the burying-ground, and see if there aint one late rose left

there on your mother's grave ; I want to press it in the Bible.

"Land sakes !" she continued, still looking from under her sinewy hand, "there's the minister. Maybe they'll walk together, and be comp'ny for each other."

So she went back to her work, contented with her lot.

Mr. Winthrop walked faster till he overtook Margaret and her charge.

"I beg your pardon," he said, gently ; "but it is so seldom I am favored with company on my long walks that I could not resist the temptation of joining you. Do you go far?"

"To my brother's."

"And I to the mills. There are several sick families there, and I find they need some of the comforts of life. I meant to speak to you about them last night."

"Don't overlook me, Mr. Winthrop," said Margaret, earnestly. "It will be a pleasure

for me to give to the destitute whenever I can."

"Thank you," he replied, quietly. "I was sure you would respond if I asked."

They were on the way to old Pomp's cottage. Now and then they could see the cheerful little place between the trees. Ida had walked very quietly, in her usual way, in the rear of her aunt, who never presumed now to offer her hand. Her eyes roved about, seeming to see the beauties on either hand, the painted cornstalks, the gayly variegated autumn trees.

"There's Pomp's little palace," said Mr. Winthrop; "a pleasant place to look at."

They were on rising ground. The glory of the forests greeted them on every hand; on all sides the rich autumn frost had hung banners. All over the front of the black man's home the vines hung in a picturesque tangle of yellow, red, and brown. The old apple-tree at the back, that shaded it from the summer heat, threw its great

gnarled branches in every direction, showing here and there a few late apples left to ripen.

"There's the old prince himself, sitting in the sunny door-way," said the minister.

Pomp was enjoying himself, after a three days' exile from the precious air, in company with his old complaint, rheumatism; and a happier face, freer from all vexations of spirit, all care pertaining to this sublunary existence, perhaps it would be difficult to find.

Suddenly, as they all came in sight of Pomp in his fez and his scarlet shirt, the child paused. An expression of rapture lighted up her features. She gave a wild, glad cry; a very jubilee of soul was in the sound; clapped her hands; then, almost flying, she gained the little gate, threw it open, and flung herself as if in an ecstasy at the old man's feet.

He looked down startled, but pleased, and, stooping, took her up on his lap.

"Why, little missy," he said.

"You are Kade," she said, breathlessly ; "my dear old Kade ; and you came over to find me, didn't you?" and she took his old black face between her slender hands, and caressed it with a soft, loving motion.

"Well, little missy, I's your sarvint, any way," he said, with grave courtesy, looking down at her, his heart warming.

"She has found her providence," whispered Mr. Winthrop. "He reminds her of somebody in India."

"Yes, my servant, dear old Kade," murmured Ida. "That's your name, — isn't it?"

"Well, 'spect it mought's well be dat as any other, miss. Kade's a heap prettier'n Pomp, any way."

Margaret stood half stupefied, by the side of the little railing. Could this radiant child be Ida? Was this the sullen, passive creature, without a heart, whom she had tried so hard to love? This sudden flame struck out of stone?

"Oh, but you are my dear, precious old Kade, who used to carry me in his arms when I was a baby. He went away a long time ago, and Alga told me he was gone to another country. He used to wear just such a cap as that; and you talk Bengalee and Hindostanee, — don't you?"

"Well, I's not quite sartain of dat, little missy," said Pomp, with a profound look. "I's never edicated, you sees."

"But you were born in India — oh, that you must be certain of; you *were* born in India."

"I doesn't hab no recollection of de place, little missy," Pomp replied, with exceeding gravity.

The child looked down, disappointed.

"Perhaps you don't know where you *were* born," she said, anxiously.

"No, chile; to tell de trooth, I doesn't know, raly.. Might as well a' been born in Indy, and mebbby I was."

"You are so much like Kade," returned the child, mournfully.

"I's no objections to bein' called Kade, by such a sweet little missy," returned the black man, with a quiet smile. "P'r'aps dat ar war my name some time — mought be. Anyhow, I's Kade to *you*, little missy."

"O you dear old Kade!" cried Ida, throwing her arms about his neck, and imprinting kisses without stint upon his withered cheeks; "how came I never to know that you were here? Now I can tell you — oh, so much! I've been so tired and unhappy here, because *all* the faces were white, and the people I loved in my own India were not white." Then she whispered in his ear, "I think Sheve must have sent you," and drew back beaming. "Alga said he could do everything, and he can, — can't he?"

Pomp, though intensely interested in the child, and as much astonished as the lookers-on, at this unusual pouring out of love and sympa-

thy, was utterly in the dark as to the cause of the child's excitement.

His fine nature supplied him with the requisite tact, however, to appreciate her unstinted caresses, and associate her behavior with some strange history of the past.

"Well, missy, ef you means de great God over all gods, den I thinks he did send me. 'Whom he will he sendeth,' says de great Book, missy."

"I *do* mean him," replied the child, her eyes dancing with pleasure. "O Kade!" she whispered in his ear, "can't I stay with you all day?"

"Well, I hasn't got all de comforts little miss is been used to," replied the old man, with a wary glance at Margaret.

"Ask my aunt," cried the child, anxiously.

"Well, if Miss Margaret say so, I be mighty proud and pleased ef she 'lows little miss to keep de comp'ny of an ole man like me."

Margaret looked at the minister.

"I think I would let her stay, Miss Margaret, he favors her illusion in such a way that he can do her more good than we can," said Mr. Winthrop. "I think the child is changed already."

"Aunty, say yes," piped the child in a tone as unlike her usual voice as the singing of the canary is distinct from the cry of the cricket.

"Very well, dear," said Margaret, her heart in a glow, the tears in her eyes. "But you must be quite willing to go home with me when I call for you. Do you think you will?"

"Yes, aunty," said the child delightedly, and seated herself on a cricket Pomp had brought from his little bedroom.



CHAPTER XXXII.

AT ROBERT'S.



OUR Undine has found a soul," said the minister, as they watched this strange sight. "Through her affections, so newly and strongly roused, we can teach her the truth. Poor child! she has no doubt been mourning for the dark faces she is so accustomed to. Pomp is a lovely Christian; he will do more than you or I could, in his simple, unsophisticated way. He will educate her through his power over her heart. Mark my words, she will be another child after to-day."

"I am thankful — so thankful!" murmured Margaret.

She never forgot that walk; the splendor she saw in the fading maples, robing themselves in witching loveliness against the day of their death. The air was full of sweet odors.

Margaret did not feel in the mood for conversation, and for some time there was silence.

Presently they passed a closed house.

"Did you hear of Mrs. Ogilvie's death?" asked the minister.

"No, indeed!" Margaret answered, with a look of surprise.

"Yes, I received news yesterday; she went on a journey to New York, and died there."

"She was — prepared, I hope," said Margaret, who was really startled by the news.

"Yes; I trust so. I was just thinking of how much beauty and comfort in life her vanity and indecision cheated her. Dr. Ogilvie is a very worldly man; he never liked her to profess

religion, and she was too much inclined to hide her light, I think. One never rests well, being half asleep ; one is never comfortable, half well ; so one never enjoys the true beauty of a religious experience, who does not come out *wholly* and *decidedly* on the Lord's side. It takes great courage, but it brings a corresponding blessing."

Margaret was silent. She felt that she was living only this wretched half-life, though conscious that she was struggling towards the light. It was to her a dark and thorny road.

"Tell *me* what to do."

The question trembled on her lips, but her pride strangled it, and presently they came in sight of Mossy Bank, and heard Robert's hearty welcome.

"Your brother will be no moping Christian," said the minister, with a smile.

He did not look like it, so radiant was his face, so brisk and alert his manner.

"I have been clearing my grape-vines ; won't you come in and have some grapes?" queried Robert, in a cheery voice.

The minister declined, saying that he had no time, and Robert went in with Margaret.

"See, this poor child is full of trouble," he said. "She has broken a glass pitcher and I can't help laughing at her poor, woful little face."

Lettie looked up crossly from the fragments.

"How do, Margaret? Just look at him, making fun of me. *I* think he's the most heartless man I ever knew."

"Come, now, little wife," said Robert, soothingly, "let it go ; 'tisn't worth mourning over. I'll get you another twice as pretty."

"It won't be this one, and I don't want another ; it's too mean," Lettie went on. "And I've spoiled my new wrapper with the milk. Hadn't you better laugh at that, too?"

She looked up, but the merriment in his eyes

was irresistible ; she bit her lip, and after a minute laughed herself, as she left the room to change her dress.

"It's so good to see you here, Margaret," Robert said, going to the door. "Of course you'll stay to dinner."

"Perhaps, if you ask me to," laughed Margaret.

"You know you're as welcome as May flowers," he retorted ; "there are plenty of grapes, — help yourself."

In great trays, and baskets, and vases, the purple, luscious fruit lay in heaps.

"Comfort the poor little wife," said Robert, and was gone.

Margaret looked about the familiar room ; she always did, when she came to Mossybank. It seemed to her, however brief the interval, as if years had passed since she had seen it before. There stood the great arm-chair in its corner,

what dreams she had dreamed in its drowsy depths !

There were charming flowers on the window stand. Lettie had that redeeming quality with all her frivolity and worldliness, — she loved flowers and took care of them.

Each time Margaret came here she reviewed her life.

"How differently I planned it all !" she said. "I used to feel so certain that I was born to some exalted station ; and here I am, alone, doing no good in the world I meant to take by storm."

Lettie came back in a few moments in fresher plumage. She looked fretted, ill, unhappy. She placed her low sewing-chair by the window, in the midst of the birds, the flowers, and the sun.

"I'm so glad you came," she said. "I've been awfully lonesome, and there's nothing but disappointment to-day. In the first place I cut my

hand with the bread-knife,—see how swelled it is. Then my maid was saucy, and I expect I shall have to dismiss her. How in the world do you get on with Sarah?”

“Why,” replied Margaret, laughing, “they say one must be mistress, and I expect I let her hold the reins. Luckily, she seldom takes advantage of it.”

“Oh, I couldn’t do that. I suppose you heard that Doctor Ogilvie’s wife was dead?”

“Yes,” Margaret replied.

“It made me so nervous. I can’t bear to hear of anybody’s dying, — anybody I know, I mean. I think it’s awful to die! Why can’t we just live on? To be sure, there’s little but suffering and care in the best of lives. I wish there was no getting meals, — the fuss and worry of over-seeing things makes me so miserable;” and she gave a long, weary sigh.

“Hand me that needle,” said Margaret, “and that work.”

"What for?"

"Because I came over here to see you, and have a good time, and I'm not going to have you worry. If this is an unfortunate day, as you say, why, you had better meet its harassments lying here on the sofa. You are sick, that's the amount of the matter, and a little nervous."

Lettie gave up her sewing, allowed herself to be led to the sofa, and comfortably settled thereon. Then Margaret found a nice china dish, and filled it with clusters of the best grapes she could find, — crimson-hearted Catawbas, — and placed them beside her.

"To be taken just whenever you feel inclined," she said; "it's nice medicine."

"I believe I am tired and cross and nervous, if not sick," said Lettie, "and Robert worries me so."

"Robert worries you!" cried Margaret, with genuine astonishment; "pray tell me how."

"Why, don't you know?" She took her

hands from her face, — a little pinched and faded it was, — “his religious notions. Who ever would have thought that Robert Ransom would turn out a saint?” she added, a little hysterically.

“Has it altered him so much?” asked Margaret. “I thought I never saw him look so well and happy.”

“Happy!” cried Lettie, pettishly; “let any man nurse a hobby, and of course he’s happy, after a fashion. He will thwart me in every way, I’m sure of it. What’s the use of going to town now? When I’m there, I want to enjoy myself, not be forever at prayer-meetings, and the like. I don’t believe he’ll let me do one thing that I like.”

“You mean he won’t care about going to fashionable parties, and places of amusement.”

“What else do you suppose I go for? What would the city be, without society, — the kind of society one wants?”

"But isn't Robert kind and pleasant?"

"Oh, yes; he can't help that; it's his nature. I can't tell you what I mean; there's a change, and I don't like it."

"He certainly must live a higher and nobler life," said Margaret.

"Yes, you'll go next, I know you will. You ought to have lived together, you two, in regular old-maid and old-bachelor style. Well, he needn't think he'll bring *me* to believe as he does, for I won't!"

"Still, Lettie, a higher Power may. When we begin to fight against God, he uses strong weapons."

"Mercy on us! are *you* gone too?" Lettie asked, with such comical earnestness that Margaret could hardly keep a straight face.

"Am *I* gone? If you mean do I feel as Robert does, I am sorry to be obliged to answer, no. I never was half as good as Robert."

Lettie's face expressed a curious assent between a frown and a smile.

"He was good enough before," she said, pettishly.

"I am sure he never seemed happier," said Margaret.

"Robert has taken a furnished house in the city," Lettie said, after a long pause.

"I suppose that pleases you."

"Why, yes; it's one of the best. I must say I didn't expect it of him. I wonder if I ought to give his religion the credit of it? Still, I shall have to mope, I know I shall; and I don't care for the city, as I said before, unless I can be gay. Excitement is my life; the want of it in this dull place is killing me. Never mind, I'll give parties. If he thinks, because I'm married, I've become a quiet, stay-at-home body, he is much mistaken, and everybody else."

"O Lettie!" There was reproof in the voice,

Was there no higher, holier view that this poor woman could take, of this, the most sacred relation in life?

"Isn't home the best place to shine in?" she asked.

"Not for me, at my age. I dare say when I get old, — and I do believe you might find gray hairs in my head, this moment, — then I expect to be a settled house-mistress; but how absurd to think of it now!"

Margaret felt, with a sinking of the heart, that both time and words were wasted on one so careless and frivolous. Now, more than ever before, she exulted in the thought that Robert had found that Rock of which she had heard, under such interesting circumstances, not quite a year ago.

Presently Lettie fell asleep, and Margaret took up the embroidery over which she had been busy.

Her heart leaped at the thought that Ida had

found a friend in Potap, who might lead her out of the cold, hard, dangerous apathy in which her soul had been locked.





CHAPTER XXXIII.

POMP'S DESCRIPTION OF THE TRUE GOD.



WHAT *are* you thinking about?"

Margaret lifted her eyes with a start. Lettie, wide awake, laid there regarding her curiously.

"I had such a delightful dream!" Lettie continued; "and it didn't seem a dream either. I thought I was at a lovely ball, and I seemed to be a queen. Upon my dress, and all over my arms, glittered the most magnificent diamonds. My only trouble was that Robert was nowhere to be seen, and I wanted to show him how beautiful my dress was. I thought that somewhere near me, a woman, in a plain brown

dress, came to me, and she had the sweetest face I ever saw. She told me that Robert was safe and wanted to see me, but that I must go to him; he couldn't come to me. She described him as being over on the other side of a mountain, and said the way was dangerous. Well, for a long time I resisted going, for I thought of my partners and my diamonds; but at last I decided to accompany her, and then she changed into you, Margaret.

"Well, I *did* go over a rocky path, and was very much frightened, for it grew dark; but, after a toilsome march, I found Robert, and I can't begin to describe to you what a splendid place I was in. Oh, the ball was nothing beside it, for on every hand it seemed covered with flowers, and the flowers, when one touched them, were all diamonds; and I felt very happy, though all my pleasure in my fine dress seemed gone. Curious dream, wasn't it? Why didn't you bring Ida with you?"

"Because I thought you didn't like the study of Natural History," replied Margaret, with a flush.

"Oh, haven't you forgotten that? I did call her an animal, I know. I couldn't help it; she seemed like one from the time she gave me such a fright with her outlandish language. She has the most repelling ways I ever saw in a child."

Margaret thought of the wonderful flashes of light and love that had illumined the child's countenance that morning like a beautiful transparency, and smiled to herself.

"You'll never find the way to her heart. I've heard of such children."

"We'll wait and see," said Margaret. She was wondering what the child was doing. She was glowing through all her frame with the delightful thought that Ida had a heart, a vital, loving heart, — a treasure that was worth watching and working for.

Meantime, Ida was very happy. Her heart had so pined for the sunshine, so longed to see something akin to the tropical memories which she cherished, that all her being took in the beauty and vitality of Pomp's chastened nature. His black face was to her like food to the starving, and she danced round his little house, and never wearied looking in his honest eyes.

He had taken her to see his chickens, and she had fallen in love directly with the pretty snow-white bantams. He had shown her all the fine points of his residence, given her fruit from his trees, and told her stories to her heart's content.

"It is not so pretty here as India," she said thoughtfully, "though I shall like it much better now I have found you. Oh, you can't think how hard I prayed to Sheve, to send me somebody to love; and he has sent you, hasn't he? I shall make him a nicer offering than ever. Have you got Sheve?"

"No, missy," said the black, curious but too polite to ask any questions.

"Do you fashion him whenever you wish to pray, then? Some people do. My Sheve is a nice one, of ebony, and its eyes are precious stones. He is old, too, and very sacred. My nurse, you see, was of the Zenanas, and it came to her from some of her family, and they got it from the very first man that ever lived; think of that! If you like, I'll show it to you—but not here in the garden."

They entered the little cottage, she leading him. Very carefully, and with exceeding gravity, she drew the precious thing from her bosom, and, untying the little bag, disclosed the ebony puppet, its disgusting face leering with a smile that was almost diabolical.

Pomp at the first glance comprehended. He was shocked; his aged face worked with emotion: his old brain swelled with thoughts too powerful to express in his dwarfed language.

All the descriptions of the heathen gods gleaned from the Bible he had at his tongue's end.

Ida was very busy in setting up her idol, and did not notice his consternation; and the wise old man kept silence for a time, looking on with a pained interest.

"You can't think how kind Sheve has been to me," the child went on, artlessly, supposing that Pomp worshipped in the same way. "Alga said he would; she said he always listened when we were in danger, if even we only *thought* a prayer. You know how to worship?"

"Yes; the old man knows how to worship the great God," said Pomp, warily.

"And I have been so afraid that my aunt or Sarah would find it out. You know they hate us and our gods. I have trembled and run away sometimes when they have only looked at me. You won't tell them; you'll never tell

them, Kade, — will you?" she caught his hand with a frightened look.

"I'll never tell, little missy, 'less you gives me leave to," he answered, gravely.

"And which god *do* you pray to?" she questioned. "Where is he? I don't see him here. They have plenty at the minister's; but they hate them there, and knock them down; it's dreadful. Where is your god?"

He led her out of the cottage, then, looking up reverently, said: —

"The heaven of heavens cannot contain Him. Thy throne is established of old. Thou art everlasting! Thou givest me the heart of this little child; help me to tell her about thee, so that she may believe."

"Where is He?" repeated Ida, impatiently.

"Little missy, my God is everywhere," he said. "The God I worship leaves his throne of glory to come into this poor heart."

"I don't know what you mean, Kade," she

said, her face perplexed with lines of thought.

"Little missy, when I worships I gits down in de dust, dis manner, an' I lifts my hands, which I tries to keep clean from 'iquity, and I says : —

"Thou great God, dat made de sky and 'arth, 'fore whom de hills melt, whose heavens declar' thy righteousness, forgive thy poor chile all the sins of his long life ; keep him spotless till death lay his cold hand on my heart ; and thine shall be the glory and the praise forever. Amen."

His manner awed the child. She looked up into the blue heavens, and then she gazed in his face ; and then, frightened, she knew not for what, began to cry. Instantly his arms were round her, and she was snuggled to his breast, where, for a time, she laid very quietly.

"But you don't offer to him?" she said, after a while, her thoughts intent on the strange worship she had seen. "I give nice things to

Sheve, — a part of everything I eat, if I can."

"Does he eat 'em, honey?" queried old Pomp.

"No."

"Then what's his mouth good for, sweet chile? Can he hear wid them ears? Did he ever speak to you, little miss, wid that mouth o' his wide open? Now my God made all de world, honey, an' you an' I; an' he speaks every time de sun shines; and his sight is like de lightnin', an' his voice de thunder. He gives us all these fields wid the golden grain, an' all the luscious peaches an' fruits of all de earth. He sets all de rivers to singin'; he rolled de great waters in dar place, and he sends de rain and pleasant weather to all of us."

"And is he better than Sheve? Oh, no; he can't be! Sheve is very great and powerful."

"Ten thousand times better. No man can make Him, you see, little missy; but some one took a piece of ebony and made *your* Sheve,

' for dey is de work of men's hands.' My great Lord have told me all about your Sheve, years and years ago."

"O Kade!" she cried, irresolutely. "Did he tell you after you came from India?"

"Yes, I spects so, if ever I *did* come from Indy, an' some country I must have come from, for I wasn't born yere, I knows. Yes, little missy, de great King of Glory I worships sits on de throne of splendor, and great armies of shinin' angels are round him. An' he bends down from all dis, and puts a Holy Book into de hands of poor old Pomp, — what is Kade, — and Kade reads about all de wonders of de heavenly kingdom, an' of His Son, de Lord Jesus Christ."

The old man had on his preaching armor now, and, thrilled as he was by the splendors that thronged upon his vision, might have held captive a less simple listener than this child whom the Spirit of the Lord had sent to him.

"And did *He* give you a book?"

"Wid thunders and wid lightnings, wid voices like de trumpets, and wid fire out of de mountain, honey; wid de liftin' up of his voice, and de openin' of all de gates of de great city, — dis Lord Jehovah give his law to his chillen. We's all got it. It's written out wid a feather taken out of Gabriel's wings, I spects, and graved wid a pencil of fire on de mighty tables of de rock, den printed on paper, an' bound in a book, and finally, poor ole Pomp, which name is Kade," he added, hastily, "is got dis word of his Master. Your aunt, Miss Margaret, is done got it, too, honey. Ask her to let you read it."

"O Kade, I can't read," said the child, sorrowfully, gazing up into the shining old face, whose exceeding beauty looked out from the pure soul, looked out of the dim old eyes.

"Den if I's you, dear little missy, I'd larn to read de fust thing. Why, I was over forty when I begun fer to learn, and I's blessed de

Lord on my knees for de knowledge, day an night. Why, dar's lots o' things you'd larn, little missy, I can't begin to tell you; all about de making o' this great world, all 'bout de holy prophets an' martyrs, — yes, little missy mus' larn to read de fust thing."

Thus, by this visit, a double blessing had been gained, — an interest in this man's God, and a desire to know what had given him so much wisdom.

"Dar aint no means of knowin' what you loses, little missy," he continued, gravely, "if you can't read de Blessed Book. Why, chile, de old man would starve, ef he didn't have dat bread and dat water. It's de good, cool water, pumped up from de livin' well; it's de bread what grows 'thin hand's reach ob de tree ob life. Why, little missy, de Lord's book is full of di'monds, and dey shine so dey lights a weary world up to heaven. Dey's full o' lamps, dem pages, and I seems to see de eyes of angels

lookin' at me out of every word. You mus' jes' learn, miss. Dey *do* say dar aint no royal road to larnin'; but I do think *all* the roads is royal."

"Aunt Margaret wants me to learn, but, O Kade," — and the child caught his arm, — "won't Sheve be very angry with me?"

"Let me see um agen, miss."

With a trembling hand, Ida took out the image.

"Now, missy, jes' you tell me how he's gwine to be angry wid you. Fus place he aint got no feelin's. How's he going to know what you say, when he aint got no hearin'? — jes' as de'f as a post. Now, little missy, I'd a great deal druther have one o' my chickens for to pray to, dan this; 'cause dey's peart an' cute, an' knows when dey's hungry, and come when they's called. But dis yer graven image, dis yer dumb dog, dat can't speak, he can't do nothin' for ye, poor

chile. S'pose I throw it over into de field, it can't take itself up, poor image."

Ida gave a terrified cry, and snatched the idoi from the old man's grasp. The power of habit, the force of superstition, was strong within her. Pomp skilfully drew her attention to other matters, and by degrees interested her in his simple, homely details.

The time passed on wings to Ida. She had not been so happy since she sat with her nurse under the Hopia branches, listening to the legends with which the woman's memory was stored.

When Margaret drove up, in Robert's carriage, to take her home, she went with reluctance and tears; but Margaret promised her she should come again, and she left her new friend quietly.



CHAPTER XXXIV.

IDA'S TRUE HEART.



AS the minister had said, Undine had found a soul. That day's visit to old Pomp, who must strongly have resembled the servant to whom Ida likened him, changed the current of the child's thoughts.

Margaret was delighted to see the new and almost eager interest she now took in the homely matters of every-day life; that she expressed an anxiety to learn to read. The few hours passed by Ida every week with old Pomp were golden. Little by little the child gathered new ideas of the true God, and the

scales were beginning to fall from her eyes. She developed a rare, sweet beauty, not only in face, but in manner. The true nature that God had given her, and of which her father, immersed in business, had not found the golden key, cropped out from the loosened soil of ignorance and superstition, and presently began to put forth beautiful flowers. Margaret felt a new love for Charley's child (she said it without trembling now), the strength of which she had hardly supposed herself capable.

"She's growing just as pretty as a picture," Sarah said. "It's like a butterfly coming from a chrysalis; while you say, What an ugly thing! there's a flashing of bright wings in your face."

Yes, Ida was growing pretty. Her curls could be wound about the finger now, and hung on her neck. Her eyes were alight with a new intelligence, and love had transformed their startled glances into softer meaning.

She often crept near Aunt Margaret, and for a moment allowed her to pass her arm about her. Sometimes she laid her head upon her shoulder, and then Margaret was happy.

At the appointed time Robert removed to the city; and, by her brother's request, Margaret took up her winter quarters, with Ida and Sarah, at Mossy Bank. Once a week Robert came to Salem, and though one could see by the calm and sweetness of his face that the peace that passeth all understanding had taken up its permanent abode in his heart, yet Margaret could read in countenance and manner that something disturbed him.

He never spoke of Lettie save in the gentlest manner; but a paragraph or two in Eleanor's letter made Margaret's heart ache.

"Lettie is plunging into gayety, and seems more thoughtless or more wicked than ever. She is out late, night after night, wears thin dresses, and frightens us all when we come to

think of her delicate health. I had her here one day, and talked seriously with her about the fearful risks she is running; but she treated all I said with such levity that I was shocked, and would have held my tongue but for Robert's sake. Maggie, if heaven should ever send me a little girl, I will never let her wear low-necked dresses from the day of her birth, *never!* It is monstrous, the way young ladies go out to evening parties. Even Mr. Gregg, a teacher in our Sunday school, and Mrs. Gregg, whom I want to consider an exemplary Christian, commit the absurd error of sending their young daughters to exhibitions, with no covering whatever upon neck and shoulders. How thinking people can do it, and run the risk of ruining the health of their children, besides lowering the standard of modesty and purity, I confess I cannot see.

"Robert is an example for us all. My tears fall, dear Margaret, as I write, for, depend

upon it, he suffers far more than we imagine. He is as gentle with Lettie as if she was his child.

"I sometimes think that under all this masquerading Lettie is secretly miserable, because her husband must be a constant rebuke to her. It must be a terrible thing to see always before one, an embodied conscience.

"Only one thing can come of this ceaseless dissipation. If one outrages nature, nature will avenge itself. She seems angry with herself sometimes, with Robert, and even with God. And yet while I condemn, I pity the poor child, for she has never been taught that the grand yet simple duties of life are worthy of an angel's doing.

"I hold my dear boy to my heart, and I pity poor Robert,—his turn of mind is so opposite to hers. And yet he loves her. What can we do, dear Margaret, to help this poor, thoughtless, frivolous child, who spends

whole days on the fitting or altering of her dresses? How shall we show her that the hundreds she throws away upon useless finery might make many a poor soul happier? As for me, I have no power over her. She seems absolutely given up to these worldly things."

- A soft voice sounded by her side, as Margaret folded up the letter, and sat thinking over its contents. She turned her face smilingly towards Ida.

"Aunt Margaret, do you want to look at Sheve, before I give him away?" asked the child.

"Yes, dear," and the grim image was placed in her hand.

"So you have learned, Ida, that this is not the true worship?"

"Yes, aunty."

"And what will you do with this ugly old fellow?"

"What *would* you do, aunty? Sarah says the

best place for it is the minister's parlor, and that I had better put it with the rest. Do you think so?"

"My blessed darling!" cried Margaret, clasping her in her arms; "yes, I think so. Birdie will put him at the head of the ranks."

The child had never before spoken of or hinted at this strange point of difference between them. It was a mark of confidence that Margaret could well appreciate.

"Do you give it up willingly, my dear?"

"Yes, aunt, but"—a look of pain in her face—"I used to think he could do anything, everything. Alga told me that if I threw myself from the top of the house on to sharp spear-points, and I had this in my bosom, I could not die. I believed it; believed he saved me when I sprang over the side of the ship the day she was buried; and there were other times when I thought he saved me; but I see now it was the great God over all gods, in the heavens, that did really take

care of me. He is beautiful, Kade says ; but this is not. He is powerful and made the world ; but some man made this. He loves all his children ; but this can't love, can he ? It's impossible."

"No, my dear little girl ; this can do absolutely nothing."

"Don't you want to call me Margaret sometimes ?" pursued the child.

"No, dear, I like Ida very well," was the reply. "Would you rather I called you Maggie ?"

"Not unless you like, Aunt Margaret."

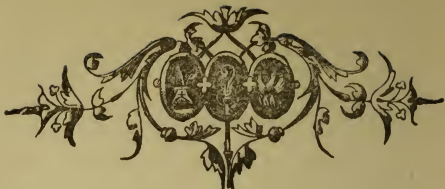
"Then you do love me a little, darling ?"

"O aunty, I love you a great deal ;" and the two little arms went around Margaret's neck, and kisses were pressed upon her cheeks. "I've been wanting to tell you so ever so many times, but someway when I tried I couldn't."

Margaret wept tears of joy. Her hour of triumph had come ; somebody loved her, unselfishly, purely ; loved her for herself alone. A

warm gush of gratitude came up in her heart towards the Giver of all good. She was beginning at last to see the way to HIM, and he had answered her prayer upon the roof-top, on that memorable night, that through this child salvation might come to her. Ida was her pearl of great price, after this.





CHAPTER XXXV.

ROBERT'S RETURN TO SALEM.



ROBERT wrote that he should be detained in the city for some time longer than he had expected, and Margaret looked for his letters now with marked anxiety.

It was the middle of March, and storm and sleet and howling winds were abroad. Nature seemed holding a grand tempest carnival, and having everything her own way.

Birdie Winthrop often came down to Mossy Bank, and enlivened the whole house with her cheerful presence. She was never tired of sitting with Margaret, admiring the house, and

listening to Sarah's stories about the dead-and-gone ancestors, who had done much good in the name of the Master. She and Ida were fast friends, and from her the child learned rapidly. In a very few weeks Ida had applied herself so assiduously that she could read simple story-books, and children's hymns.

One day they were all sitting together, watching the snow driving furiously over the valley beyond, when Sarah came in with a telegraph dispatch, which read as follows :—

"My little son sends you greeting, through me. Born this morning—a beautiful boy. God be thanked !"

In a few days came a letter. Lettie was far from well, Robert said ; their return must be delayed somewhat.

March howled into April, April wept into May, and May melted into June, before Robert dared come home with his treasures.

"Please prepare Lettie's room carefully,"

wrote thoughtful Robert; ' she is still very much of an invalid. Tell Sarah she must not leave us, and it is as much Lettie's wish as mine. You must not return to the farm till my wife is better. Be prepared for a great change in poor little Lettie. I hoped her strength would return with the warm weather, but it does not seem to. The boy is thriving, though but a tiny cherub. He is always still and patient, though he does not look very strong. I shall bring a nurse home with us.

"You cannot tell how I long to get back to dear old Salem. These past five months have been crowded with excitement and the spirit of unrest. I don't love the city, and I think Lettie is growing less fond of it. We shall start on Wednesday; you will be at the depot, with Sarah, if possible."

Margaret read this letter to Sarah; and Sarah, with her old, grim smile, said she

s'posed it was a call of duty; but mark her words, Mrs. Ransom would be more Lettieish than ever, and as to being sick, there was no need of it; she had brought it all on herself.

However, she went briskly to work putting the house in thorough order; and Birdie came down and worked a beautiful tidy for Lettie's room.

"It ought to be made just as pleasant as possible," she said. "How pleased she will be with it!" for Margaret had brightened up the furniture, and replaced the faded chintz by new.

Margaret's hands and heart were full now. Not only was she learning to be submissive to the will of God, not only was she striving to enter in at the strait gate, but she had undertaken the whole charge of Ida's education.

The child's chief anxiety was to learn, that

she might read *THE WORD* which God had given to his children; and she progressed wonderfully.

Ida seemed sensible that she had, in former days, done Margaret injustice; for she would often leave her book and go to her teacher for a kiss, or give her a loving word.

It was one of the sweetest days of sweet June, when Robert came home with his wife and child.

Neither by his notes, nor by Eleanor's letters, was Margaret prepared for the change in her brother's wife. The thin, white, shadowy creature, lifted out in Robert's strong arms, and carried like a babe up to her room,—could this be Lettie?

"The Lord forgive me!" said Sarah, devoutly, "for all I've said and thought; she's not long for this world, poor young thing!"

Margaret was so shocked, following her

brother to the room she had prepared, that Lettie noticed it.

"Good patience, Margaret, don't look so scared! I hope you don't think I'm so very sick, because Robert makes a baby of me. I'm well enough, only weak;" and she sank back from sheer exhaustion.

Margaret and Robert exchanged glances.

"Do you see how nice your old room looks, dear?" queried Robert.

"Yes, very nice; I suppose it is Margaret's work. What good taste she has! But, after all, I wish I had had the library bedroom fitted up."

"This is a great deal pleasanter, — don't you think so?" asked Margaret, for the first time finding her voice.

"Well, I don't know but it is. All places are pretty much alike to me when I'm not feeling very well. Perhaps it is best. Going downstairs will be a novelty when I get over this.

What a dull winter you must have had, Margaret!" she added, a moment after.

"I am used to Salem, you know," said Margaret.

"Yes, I know; but you can't think what a delightful time I had, before this weakness came on, you know. There hasn't been a gayer winter in town, they say, for years. How disagreeably light it is here!" she added, with an invalid's querulousness.

Margaret adjusted the curtains.

Sarah with the nurse and the baby were downstairs when Margaret went down.

"Well," cried Sarah, "if I don't call this a judgment. Such a wee bit of a baby!"

Robert came down.

"He'll be a likely boy one of these days," he said, in a voice he tried in vain to steady.

"Yes, indeed," said astute Sarah. "I knew of a little child who seemed ill and dying for

months; but he's alive and well and strong now, -- a man grown."

"Did you?" cried Robert, and the sweetest look came in his face. "God bless you, Sarah! you have comforted me."

"Well, you poor soul, I'm glad o' that," murmured Sarah, as he left the room; "but that one had a strong, sensible mother, while this one had a --"

"Hush, Sarah!" said Margaret.

"I can't help it, Miss Margaret, when I see things go so wrong, and only a thimbleful of sense would right them. God gives his creatures health, and they fritter it away, and then talk of the dispensations of Providence. Why can't folks do better? There's no need to mince matters; people dig their graves with their teeth and fill them by their carelessness; and she's done it. Well, I tell you that we've got our hands full, that's all."

Margaret was quite aware of that. Lettie

was a restless invalid, — easy in one place only for a few moments at a time. Her over-anxiety to be well only stimulated her disease into greater activity.

"I do hope I shall be better in May," she said, day after day. "I wish Robert would change the doctor. I never felt so miserable in my life. I thought the air here was going to build me right up; Robert brags so about it. I am going to have the new doctor."

The new doctor came, but he said very little. It was just possible she might grow stronger, he told Margaret, who devoted all her time to her brother's wife.

"It's too bad to put me right in sight of a church-yard!" Lettie burst out, one day. "I hate the sight of it!"

Margaret was very weary, but her patience was inexhaustible. She moved the invalid's chair, and Lettie sat for a long time, her face covered by her thin fingers.

"I wish I had never been born!" she sobbed, at last.

"O Lettie, don't say that!" Margaret was beside her. "Try to think everything is for the best."

"What! my own wicked, thoughtless, miserable conduct? You don't know, Margaret — you don't know. I have done much of it to spite poor Robert, because he got religion. I don't deserve any pity, — I don't deserve to be cared for. I did it all to torment Robert, and now, — I see what you all think of me, I read it in *your* face, and in the doctor's manner, — I am never going to get well. I am going to die — to die! and be buried. Oh, how awful!"

"Lettie — Lettie; don't talk so!" said Margaret, aghast.

"And I never did a good thing in all my life; not one good thing that I can look back upon; that's the worst of it. I have driven

every serious thought away; I have hated good," moaned the stricken woman.

"We none of us have done good, dear," murmured Margaret.

"Yes, you have; see how *you* have cared for your brother; how you took that poor child and bore with it; and Robert! — Robert's an angel!" she sobbed. "O Margaret, if I could only be like him! I've said so at the very time I was tormenting him, and he so patiently bearing with my follies. What shall I do, Margaret, with all the dreadful thoughts that throng upon me? I'm frightened!" — she held out her thin hands while her face quivered with real terror, — "O Margaret, I'm frightened!"

Margaret went closer to the sick chair, and laid the poor golden head on her bosom.

"I can only tell her there is a way to peace," said Margaret to herself; "but I know it not. How can I comfort her?"

"Miss Margaret," said Sarah, putting her

head inside the door, "Mr. Winthrop is downstairs."

"Tell him to excuse me now," said Margaret, softly.

Lettie lifted her wan, pale face.

"No, no, Margaret; tell Sarah to let him come up; perhaps he will say something to comfort me; tell him I wish to see him, Sarah."

Margaret smoothed her hair, and kissed her white cheek.

"Would you rather have me go?" she whispered.

"Yes, Margaret; I have so little courage. I will tell him just how wicked I have been."

Margaret went out as the minister entered, his face looking as if he had passed some Mount of Transfiguration on his way. Margaret heard them talk together in low tones for nearly an hour, and then the solemn, pleading voice of prayer went up to the throne of God.

Instinctively she fell on her knees, and involuntarily she cried out : —

“ Me, too — bless me, O my Father, and show me where I may find peace ! ”

She did not see the minister, for she was busy when he went away, but she found Lettie softened, gentle, her face no longer distorted with unhappy emotions.





CHAPTER XXXVI.

A REGENERATION.

LETTIE found great pleasure in Birdie's society. The girl had such a cheerful way of putting things, — such outbursts of merry thoughts, — such pretty little devices for keeping an invalid interested, that Sarah said she was a perfect sunbeam in the house.

Ida was still shy of Lettie; she could not, if she would, forget that first greeting, but she came sometimes and sat quietly at Lettie's side, while Margaret was downstairs, and Lettie always said there was something soothing in her presence.

One day Lettie had been talking about the future. It was not quite bright to her vision, she said, nor yet all dark.

"Tell Robert, some time, when I am gone, how beautiful his life has been to me, when he little thought that I took any interest in it. Tell him that often, when dressed for some gay assemblage, I have been on the point of flying to him, and begging him to save me from myself, but my wicked pride prevented.

"I might have been a happy wife, I might have been a happy mother. O Margaret, *can* God forgive me for wantonly throwing away my life? Will he visit my sins upon the head of my helpless babe?

"Mr. Winthrop pities and prays for me. Robert loves me and prays for me. Oh, how kind, and gentle and forgiving he is! He forgets himself utterly in my service.

"I am sorry for my past life, — very, very sorry!" she said, pitifully.

"Do you like to sit there?" asked Margaret, thinking of her sister's former objections.

"Yes; I don't mind seeing the graveyard as much as I did. I have always dreaded to die, — dreaded to think of death; but it don't seem quite so terrible now I really expect it. But oh, I am so helpless, so ignorant, though I *do* try to believe that God for Christ's sake has forgiven me, and will not lay up my wasted life against me. Still, do you know it seems contemptible, cowardly, to give all one's best energies, all one's heart, to the world, till one comes to die, and then to offer such a remnant to God? I shall never be as happy as I might, in heaven, I am afraid, for thinking of that. I shall be very, very grateful, but how can I be happy?"

"Perhaps your own happiness should be the last thing you ought to think of," said Margaret, gently. "I have been trying for some time, like yourself, to find the right way, and I have

just determined that, come what may, happiness or self-sacrifice, life or death, I *will* believe in the Lord Jesus, and cast all my burdens upon him, — yes, everything; nothing is mine; all is his.”

As Margaret spoke the words softly, sincerely, a new and sudden revelation broke upon her.

What did it mean? What was this clear, shining, inward light, irradiating her soul, penetrating and thrilling every conscious nerve?

What was this strange newness of all created things that broke upon her senses? What had she done, or said, or thought, to merit it? It was not earth, but heaven; not home, but glory. Was she transported out of herself? Was this the renunciation of idols that the minister had talked about? and had self been indeed her idol?

Her work fell from her hands, and she gazed!

unconscious, almost, in Lettie's face, while her soul laughed within her in ecstasy.

"You look so happy!" said Lettie, curiously.

"O Lettie! why, I *am* happy, — filled with joy. I can't tell you how it came about; but as I finished speaking just now, it seemed as if an electric light thrilled me, and there came down upon me such peace, — such sweet, deep, profound joy, such unutterable love! And, Lettie, it grows brighter and brighter, flowing like a river. It must be the adorable Saviour. O Lettie, he has redeemed me! I am his child; I know it. I love him with all the love there is in my soul."

Lettie burst into tears.

"Let us both praise him! Let us exalt, let us glorify, HIS name!" cried Margaret. "Thank him that I am no longer my own. I belong to the blessed Jesus, the world's great Saviour.

"Oh, I am not worthy of this wonderful blessing, though I have prayed for it for years. All

my life I have hungered and thirsted for poor, human love; but of this, so blissful, so holy, O Lettie, I am not worthy."

"Pray for me," whispered Lettie.

"Yes, I can pray now," said Margaret. "I shall never be ashamed or afraid to pray."

Those exalted moments, that time of holy refreshing, Margaret remembered when she bent over Lettie's apparently dying bed. But though they watched and waited in prayerful solicitude, the great destroyer came not. Some strong angel, sent from the throne of Jehovah, stayed his course, and Lettie, a miracle to herself, began, from that hour, slowly to recover.

Looking in her white, patient face, one could see that a thorough change had taken place in all the habits of her mind.

She would never be again the wayward, thoughtless creature she had been,—never. Her very countenance was changed; her voice was softer; the gentle grace of thankfulness dwelt in

her smile. With her little child in her arms, what resolves she made over the unconscious creature! With every breath, almost, she gave him to God, and she studied diligently that she might learn the way to train this new and living soul.

Robert was, as he avowed himself, the happiest man alive. His wife spared to him, and, better than all, a disciple of the Holy One; his child gradually gaining strength and vigor, and perhaps long years of domestic happiness before him, — what more could he ask?

How often they sang, softly :—

“ Give me a calm and thankful heart,
From every murmur free;
The blessings of thy grace impart,
And make me live to thee ! ”

Not long after Lettie's convalescence, which was aided by her happier state of mind, her rest in the new faith, Reuben Winthrop wrote thus in his Thought-Book :—

———“I asked God for a few souls, and truly he has given me a harvest. Come what will, O Father, thou hast prepared for me an undying joy. There is no work so great, so glorious, as the work I do for thee. Strip me of all earthly good, deny me the sweet influences of home, give me neither wife, children, nor friends, if so THOU seest fit, but stay THOU by me.

———“The little child who worshipped false gods is to day a little soldier of the cross, — a happy, beautiful Christian. Old Pomp and she meet together, — master and disciple, — and glorious times they have. How good it is to see one soul redeemed from sin! More wonderful is this great miracle than the creation of a world.

———“Miss Margaret has come out for Christ. A rare and dignified character like hers one seldom sees. I can hardly realize that she fought through so many struggles to

find at last the peace that passeth all understanding. God took her idols from her, one by one, and left her alone in his universe. For long years she would not be comforted: but now she is the happiest Christian I ever met. She will be a blessing to the world in some way. I foresee it. This faith will develop new and unknown virtues.

———"I am doing good under the Lord. Salem is being regenerated. I can point to this and that happy home, where once were brawling and drunkenness, — where now all is love, and peace, and prayer.

"Is this delusion?

"John Clarke and Anna, his wife, lived six years ago at a little place called the Cove. He was a Cape fisherman, and carried the vilest tongue I ever listened to. He whipped Anna often, and once they fought together, till both came near their death. Nobody cared for them, they were vilely common, sunk below the brutes.

Their faces had lost the ordinary expression of humanity. God sent me to the Cove with a few Christian men, and the Spirit arrested John and Anna.

"Not a mile from here stands a pretty cottage. Religion develops the taste, brings out hidden beauties in the minds of rough men sometimes. The land about that cottage is cultivated and neatly fenced in. The house is full of good furniture, and you can sometimes see a man and woman busily employed in its large garden.

"Religion has refined their faces, their manners, their speech, by refining their hearts. They have learned to read, and the Bible is their chief delight. No more foul blasphemies, but instead the sweet song and the morning and evening sacrifice before the altar of God.

"Every Sabbath, neatly attired, they come to church, and are among my most attentive hearers. It is good to see their eyes light up ;

it is good to feel that I have their honest prayers.

"Is this delusion?

—— "Order, beauty, health, strength, intelligence, even wealth, — all follow the acceptance of God's grace, all go in the wake of obedience to him.

"O Christian men! O Christian women! O Christian little children! work! work! work! We can have gardens in the wilderness of every sinful heart, if we work. God may be worshipped everywhere.

"The world goes on so blindly! but it is God's world nevertheless. Let me do what I will in my little corner, diligently teaching that whosoever will serve God shall have abundant rewards both in this life, and in the life to come; and whosoever will continue to sin, to him shall come spiritual death. Let me never shrink from proclaiming the whole truth, — happiness for the holy, punishment for the guilty.

"Nothing keeps the Christian from repining so thoroughly as this thought : —

"God stands at the helm of the universe, and through storms and clouds and wrecks of many a noble ship, he sees land.

———"I am glad I came to Salem, when the harvest was ripe. I rejoice, with many others, that Mrs. Ransom is spared to her little family, and spared in such a way that it seems a signal mercy from God."





CHAPTER XXXVII.

CONCLUSION.



MARGARET divided her time between the farm and Mossy Bank. Sarah remained at the latter place, quite reconciled now to Robert's wife.

"She tries her best," was Sarah's comment to Margaret; "and when I see people trying to do the best they can, I don't expect no more. She'll always be delicate," was the conclusion; "but she'll never go to routs and parties again, and that'll save her."

It was a curious phase of Margaret's new state of mind, that when John wrote, begging her

to share his foreign home with him, she did not refuse.

"Only say the word," he wrote, "and I will come after you. It will do the child more good just now than years of hard study."

Margaret did not now feel too holy to dwell with her infidel brother. Neither did she lay plans for his conversion; she simply carried him in her prayers to the Lord.

In the early autumn months, John came after her, radiant with pleasure. Not without deep grief did Margaret bid farewell to Salem. Birdie wept like one who would not be comforted; but on her way home, half angry at Reuben's composure, — for he had accompanied her to the cars, — she said: —

"You didn't care; you take such tranquil leave of your dearest friends! Is it because you are a minister?"

Her brother smiled.

"I had a little conversation with Miss Mar-

garet," he said, a soft color gathering in his cheeks; "and I think, when she returns to Salem, she will, maybe, come to the parsonage and live."

"O Reuben, are you in earnest?" cried Birdie, her eyes shining like diamonds. "O Ruby, what a blessing for you, but most of all for me!"

"I don't know about that," said the minister, smiling.

"Well, then, I'm not going to be sad any more," and she wiped the tears away. "How pleasant it will be to furnish the house, and get everything ready! You have made me so happy! Dear, dear Margaret!"

Meantime Margaret enjoyed her liberty to the utmost. Her brother was one of the pleasantest of travelling companions, and enlivened the journey by his rare conversational powers, and his freshness and originality of thought.

Margaret, after her arrival in Rome, became

the mistress of one of the best houses in that city of wonders. Day after day with unabated ardor she sought out its ancient palaces, its objects of interest, Ida accompanying her, and whenever John had leisure he made one of the party.

At the frequent reunions held at the house of the consul, Margaret was the ornament of every circle. Her modesty, her unaffected gentleness, her refined and thoughtful beauty made her always appreciated, and though many of John's closer friends were men of what he called liberal ideas, — in other words, infidel tendencies, — they yet respected the woman who lived closely up to her principles, and never, in any way, denied the beautiful faith that had opened to her a new life.

John had promised never to interfere in her religious privileges; but when, sometimes, the little circle with whom she met stately for evening prayers interfered with his plans for

some particular enjoyment, he was uneasy and unhappy.

"What can you see in that brawling woman?" he said one day, as Margaret casually remarked that she was engaged for the evening at Mrs. Hamlin's.

"Mrs. Hamlin is a very peaceable, lovely lady," said Margaret; "you must have mistaken the person."

"No, I haven't; I know her well; she wears white curls," was the reply, "and is all the time after money."

"Because she belongs to several charitable societies," Margaret answered. "She is one of the best women in Rome."

John shook his head.

"How a woman of your high spirit can visit those little Protestant gatherings, I can't imagine! Do you know there is danger? All such meetings are watched."

"I am the sister of the American Consul,"

said Margaret, quietly; and John, as usual, accompanied her to the strange old castle in which Mrs. Hamlin had taken up her abode.

In a little room met the few disciples of the Lord. From that pleasant place Margaret carried spiritual strength for the needs of the coming week. With hesitancy and trembling, she laid the case of her brother before the little band; and he was prayed for with a fervency that took hold of the promises and would not be denied.

There is power in prayer.

John watched Margaret with keen solicitude, anxious to see some failure, to probe some weak spot. But her unconscious dignity and constant sweetness of spirit foiled all his attempts. Was this the Margaret with whom he had fought so many battles, whose anger often got the better of her judgment in the old times, and who assailed him with weapons of bitterness?

"How changed you are, Margaret!" he said once.

"Yes, John," was the quiet reply; "I have done fighting."

"You are waiting, I suppose, expecting the enemy to succumb," he responded.

She looked up at him with a quick, bright smile.

"I am waiting God's time. He never disappoints."

"Do you think he is going to grant you any particular favor?"

"If it is good for me."

"Christians are fanatics."

There was no reply. It was plain he hoped they should drift into their old wordy controversy.

"Come, now," he asked, after a long pause, "do you consider my case entirely hopeless?"

"No; I do not. I consider it very hopeful."

"Why?"

"Because you are annoyed at my peculiarities, as you call them."

"Spending the jolliest day here in retirement, being one of them."

"Keeping the Sabbath, you mean."

"Yes; you will never see Rome as you ought to, while you do that. But then, as I said, Christians are fanatics."

"And what are infidels?" queried Margaret.

"People of good, sterling common sense."

"Would you rather I were one?" she asked, lifting her clear eyes to his face. "I feel a peace, a happiness, such as I never felt before: would you rob me of that? I have some one to go to, and lay before HIM all my burdens, cares, and crosses, and he takes them from me, and bears them himself. I have a motive for living, such as I never had before: life has taken on a new meaning; death is robbed of its terror; heaven seems a reality: would you

have me exchange all that for your unbelieved life?"

"I would have you—just as you are," he said, bluntly; and immediately repented of it, going into a labored defence of his own belief. Margaret heard him patiently, but was not to be provoked into her old irritable defiance; and her brother felt in his heart that she *was* changed.

"Do you know I told you once," she said, "that either from my dying bed, or by yours, I should tell you that, by personal experience, I should know what religion was? I am thankful God has not left it to that extreme time, but that while we are both in health, I can say to you, 'Behold what the Lord hath done for me!'"

John said nothing, but shortly went out.

Ida grew very fond of her Uncle John. She often sat with him after the day's duties were done, or wandered among noble ruins and an-

cient relics, talking about India. She told him of old Pomp ; of his sweet Christian faith ; of her conversion from idolatry, and described the god Sheve, giving many instances of his worship.

Simple as they were, their little talks were not without their effect upon John, and, long before he was seized with the fatal fever that ended his life, he thought upon them with unusual seriousness.

When he was stricken down, Margaret could only pray for him. Day and night she watched by his bedside, feeling no fatigue, and only imploring Heaven that he might know her again.

One heavenly morning, when the sky looked one great sapphire, and the cool wind lifted the curtains, and fanned the heated brow, John opened his eyes. His glance was full of intelligence.

"John, dear, do you know me?" asked his sister.

"Yes, Margaret. How long have I been sick?"

I feel no pain now, but like one awakened from a delicious dream."

"Were you really dreaming, John?"

"It seemed so. You were with me. We walked through fields elysian, and as we moved on, One came from the distance, a glorious being, clothed in white. You said to me, 'Are you now convinced that this is the Son of God?' and I answered, 'I am.'"

"O John!"

"Don't cry, dear; overlook all my folly, my selfish reasoning. What time is it?"

"Four o'clock."

"Some way I don't seem to be afraid. I should like to make some amends though. I have done harm to others."

"O John, *do* you believe?"

"Since I saw that celestial face — yes. I had been thinking, Margaret, for a long time. Will you bring me some paper and a pencil?"

"You are too weak to write, John."

"Yes, I am,"—his fingers refusing to close over the slender shaft he held. "Margaret, write for me.

Margaret wrote as he dictated, through blinding tears :—

"I die believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has had mercy upon me in my last hours."

"O John, you may live to do much good yet," said Margaret, softly.

"No, dear, I shall die to-night. Can you guide my hand? I wish to sign it."

She guided his hand, and the document was finished.

"Will you show it to my friends?"

Margaret sobbed assent.

"I am so glad you are here, my Margaret!" and these were his last words, as he clasped her hand in his.

At twelve that night he passed from sleep to death — from death to life eternal.

The prayers of that little company, who wor-

shipped God in the midst of the idolatries of that wonderful city, were heard and answered by the Father ; and Margaret, in the midst of her grief, bereaved and alone, was yet happy. He was saved to her ; he was one of the family of the redeemed. His mother's dying prayer had not gone up in vain.

Once more we find Margaret at Mossy Bank, in the sweet spring-time of the year. She sits with Robert's little boy in her arms, as they gather round to hear of John's last moments,—Lettie, Sarah, and Robert. Ida astonishes them all by her improvement, both in mind and body. Presently what everybody is expecting happens.

The door opens, and in rushes Birdie, followed by her brother. For the first few moments foolish little Birdie can do nothing but cry, but by and by she gasps out that she is so glad.

And Reuben looks his gladness.

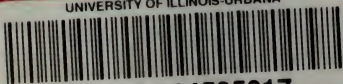
Presently friends and acquaintances drop in, and there is great rejoicing in spite of the affliction which has resulted in Margaret's early return.

Not many months elapse before Reuben writes some pleasant things in his *THOUGHT-BOOK*, while Margaret sits by his side, with a smile on her lovely face.

She has been kept from idolatry; she has given her life into the hands of God, and she is happy.



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